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Conceptions of Responsibility and Visions of the Common Life:

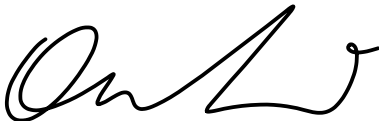
A Comparative Study of Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan

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Doctorate in Practical Theology and Christian Ethics
The University of Edinburgh
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Declaration

I, Quan Li, declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signature  Date 10 February 2020

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative study of the practical theories of responsibility across different traditions. The two thinkers under comparison are the Christian theologian Karl Barth and the Confucian philosopher Mou Zongsan. The thesis demonstrates that, despite their significant divergence, both Barth and Mou place the conception of responsibility at the centre of their visions of the common life. Furthermore, their moral theories allow us to develop a constructive position on the character and practice of responsibility, that is, our genuine wills and actions of responsibility can only take form in dialogical relationships with the supreme person(s) and with each other.

The comparative project includes four interrelated tasks. First, in the case of Karl Barth, we investigate the meaning and significance of the theological ethics of individuals called by the divine Word of God to be morally responsible for her life and the lives of others. Second, in the case of Mou Zongsan, we examine the Confucian conception of responsibility and its significance for moral exercises of extending the innate knowledge. Third, we compare two conceptions of responsibility in terms of its source and action and their practical relevance to the common life. Finally, we consider the potential for their approaches to refine the ethics of responsibility in conversations with its modern and traditional forms in moral philosophies and its extensions in political and social theories.

Drawing from constructive dialogues across traditions and disciplines, we can pave the way for promising versions of responsibility and contribute to the enterprise of comparative ethics. The new formulations of responsibility are two ethical syntheses with teleological components under act-deontological frames which allow us to stress the practical dimension of responsibility without sacrificing its normative sources. Moral knowledge and moral action can also be reunited in accordance with their traditions. Furthermore, by offering mandates which secure the formal and constant character in the dynamic and contextualized process of moral formation, such conceptions can assist our contextual and virtuous action towards a common life. Finally, they provide nascent political languages which connect tradition and democracy without undermining each side, and moreover, articulate the purpose and means of moral formation in democratic politics.

Lay Summary

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For Jenny, Theodora and Christopher

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Abbreviations

Works by Karl Barth

<i>AS</i>	<i>Against the Stream</i>
<i>CD</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i>
<i>CP</i>	<i>The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day</i>
<i>CSC</i>	<i>Community, State and Church</i>
<i>RII</i>	<i>The Epistle to the Romans 2nd ed.</i>
<i>PT</i>	<i>Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century</i>
<i>TJC</i>	<i>The Theology of John Calvin</i>

Works by Mou Zongsan

<i>AF</i>	<i>Autobiography at Fifty</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Buddha-Nature and Prajñā</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>A Critique of the Communist International and the Chinese Communist Party</i>
<i>EW</i>	<i>Early Works of Mou Zongsan</i>
<i>II</i>	<i>Intellectual Intuition and Chinese Philosophy</i>
<i>LH</i>	<i>Lectures on Humanities</i>
<i>LX</i>	<i>From Lu Xiangshan to Liu Jishan.</i>
<i>MI</i>	<i>Moral Idealism</i>
<i>MS</i>	<i>Mind-Substance and Nature-Substance</i>
<i>NL</i>	<i>Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy</i>
<i>PT</i>	<i>Phenomena and the Things in Themselves</i>
<i>TF</i>	<i>Times and Feelings</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

One of the pressing issues in contemporary moral outlook on individuals and communities is the decline of collective responsibility under political regimes such as communism, Nazism and neoliberalism. This has been one impetus for a great debate between contemporary thinkers about the condition of modernity and the relevance of moral and religious traditions for the cultivation of a common and virtuous life.¹ The major lesson is that we need a balanced way to articulate the moral and political structures of our communal life while still doing justice to the ethos of each. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to discover robust practical theories of responsibility, with the potential to respond to contemporary societies' growing decline in moral responsibility. Specifically, we aim to surpass the current debate by maintaining a rigorous democratic commitment from a cross-cultural perspective. We thus consider two influential thinkers – the Christian theologian Karl Barth and the Confucian philosopher Mou Zongsan – by comparing their conceptions of responsibility. Despite their significant differences, both Mou and Barth place the idea of responsibility at the centre of their moral visions of the common life. It is this common pursuit that makes their moral theories relevant and inspirational for contemporary ethical reflection.

In the sections below, we propose the research question, review the major debates in the field, and outline the theoretical and practical elements of the comparative agenda. Here we formulate our comparative project of ethics by following the procedural guidance suggested by John Kelsay. According to Kelsay, a productive and perspectival practice shared by comparative scholars includes four major procedures: (1) stating a problem; (2) explaining the reasons that such a problem might be thought important, in a way reflective of the cultural location of the author; (3) offering an interpretive account of materials deemed relevant to the problem identified; and (4) expressing the hope that readers might find the results illuminating, with the assumption that the cultural location could be shared by the author and the readers.² Each of these four tasks will be handled in a subsequent section.

¹ In this study, the terms “modern” and “modernity” are used to refer to a historical period. While there is little consensus as to when the modern era began, scholars agree that it was exemplified by the period subsequent to the onset of modern warfare which date to the eighteenth century, typified by the two world wars in the twentieth century and succeeded by postmodernism. In the most cases, we apply these terms strictly to individuals during the time of Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan. For discussions of the time period and phases of modernity, see Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2010).

² John Kelsay, “The Present State of the Comparative Study of Religious Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 40, no. 4 (2012): 588. Kelsay confesses that such phrases are borrowed from the historian of science Thomas Kuhn.

1.1 The problem of responsibility

The last century has witnessed massive human tragedies under the hegemonies of communism, Nazism, and most recently, rampant neoliberalism. But despite the abuse of power by dictators and monopolists, it is the decline of collective responsibility under these political regimes that deserves the most serious moral reflection. This question, emerging around the globe, has compelled thinkers to re-examine the intellectual and ethical foundations of modern politics. Contemporary thinkers following Isaiah Berlin are obsessed with certain kinds of political religions. In *The Stillborn God*, Mark Lilla charges Christians with the abuse of political theology in the modern political arena, for such a religious account of politics itself is misguided by obscure doctrines like the trinity, incarnation and eschatology.³ John Gray, in his *Black Mass*, attributes the same phenomena to the utopian projects of human perfection driven by apocalyptic religions and Enlightenment philosophies.⁴ For certain reasons, these thinkers share a common worry – that moderns can easily be led astray by a variety of religious passions or moral fantasies. Therefore, in order to keep the integrity of our common life, they see it as critical to reject any religious ethics in either teleological or deontological form. For Lilla, religious doctrines have never offered a clear direction for such ethics. For Gray, the religious

See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

³ Lilla questioned, for instance, “Withdrawal into monasticism, ruling the earthly city with the two swords of church and state, building the messianic New Jerusalem – which is the true model of Christian politics? For over a millennium Christians themselves could not decide, and this tension was the source of almost unrelenting struggle and conflict, much of it doctrinal, pitting believer against believer over the very meaning of Christian revelation....All politics involves conflict, but what set Christian politics apart was the theological self-consciousness and intensity of the conflicts it generated – conflicts rooted in the deepest ambiguities of Christian revelation.” See Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics and the Modern West* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2007), 51-52.

⁴ John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 1-35. In the judgment of John Gray, the rise of Maoism in modern China is a poisonous fruit of modern political ideologies. He is only half right. The moral predicament of Maoism is as old as the enterprise of ethics. As early as 1925, when the young Communist Mao Tse-tung (毛泽东) was eager to find a tool for class collation and pave the way for his party and its revolutionary endeavour, he posed the central question at the beginning of his analysis: “Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution.” The subsequent trajectory of Chinese politics witnessed the instant blessing and eternal curse of this motto. Along with their military success in the civil war, the Communists promptly grew to be the single legitimate power in state governance, and Mao himself effectively seized supreme power within the party. Meanwhile, Mao and his followers applied the same principle into their power struggles against any presumed enemies in parties, institutions, classes and society. The recurring human tragedies from the Cultural Revolution to the Tiananmen massacre find their intellectual roots in Mao’s philosophy of struggle. This is the disguised egoism of the strong and powerful. Echoing Carl Schmitt’s notorious friend-enemy distinction but enforced with more ruthless manoeuvres in practice, Mao’s revolutionary vision has *de facto* dehumanised his fellow men and women and destroyed the integration of communal life. On behalf of human liberation, it directed people to the path of mutual destruction. See Mao Tse-tung, “Analysis of the Classes of the Chinese Society,” March 1926, in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. I*, available at: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/index.htm>.

projection of ultimate goals for humankind is nothing but a catastrophe of modern history. While some may disagree with their functionalist readings of religious and moral traditions, we cannot ignore the challenge posed here: Is there any form of moral practice to generate and sustain our wills and actions of responsibility, and meanwhile avoid the various moral traps of the hegemonies listed above?

What the liberal-oriented thinkers see as the overall crisis of the religious assumptions of humanity and society, in the eyes of religious ethicists it is the intrinsic weakness of capitalist regimes and their assumptions of liberalism which should be responsible for the irresponsibility of social groups, both the privileged and the unprivileged. One famous example is Alasdair MacIntyre, who dismisses liberal democracy in the capitalist world as merely “civil war carried on by other means.”⁵ He sees modern self-interested individualists as the very products of the market and the liberal-democratic state, lacking the virtues required to sustain an admirable way of life because they refuse to be bound together in a shared community. Similarly, John Milbank and his colleagues, in their influential *Radical Orthodoxy*, criticise modern democratic culture as an ideology-driven secularism. The secular state, in their view, is essentially dedicated to replacing the Christian account of salvation with a secularist one.⁶ The Church as a moral community, therefore, must remind itself that it “does not exist to provide an ethos for democracy or any other form of social organisation” as Stanley Hauerwas insists.⁷ According to these traditionalist thinkers, the modern vision of liberal democracy has proved to be fundamentally detrimental to the formation of the virtuous and responsible self and thus deserves to be relinquished, if not abandoned altogether. Partly under their influence, both moral and political theorists have turned from their disenchantment with the failure of capitalist modernity and have begun to appreciate the relevance of their distinctive traditions and religions to the cultivation of a virtuous and common life.

This resurgence of traditionalism is not unique to the Western world. In many other societies, the revival of religious or moral traditions is also underway. For instance, Islam in North Africa and the Middle, Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, and Hindutva in India. Since the 1980s, signs of renewed interest in Confucianism have begun to appear in China, a socialist country in transition to a version of neoliberalism.⁸ The earliest indications

⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

⁶ John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1-20.

⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward A Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 12.

⁸ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Chapter 5.

were seen in academia, as research and writing on Confucianism emerged and grew. Then the political arena saw Confucian symbols playing a significant role: Chinese party leaders, for example, deliberately selected Confucian themes like “rule by virtue” and “harmonious society” to underpin their policies.⁹ A number of Confucian civil society organisations also began to engage in local public affairs.¹⁰ Under the auspices of the government, Confucian scholars and activists felt more confident about publicizing their positions against the radicalization of modern socialist democracy than at any time since the 1949 establishment of the People’s Republic. Jiang Qing (蒋庆), the foremost advocate of this movement, has dedicated the prime of his career to renewing the political aspects of traditional Confucianism. He believes that Confucianism must be institutionalized as a formally organised religion to overcome the fallacy of radical modernization in China.¹¹ Another active figure in the movement, Kang Xiaoguang (康晓光), has proposed that the Chinese government should replace its Communist ideology with a soft authoritarianism based on Confucian doctrines.¹² Yet again, Fan Ruiping (范瑞平) rejects any effort at connecting liberal democratic concepts with Confucianism; furthermore, he sets up his “reconstructionist Confucianism” project by “reclaiming and articulating moral resources from the Confucian tradition so as to meet contemporary moral and public policy challenges.”¹³ These contemporary disciples of Confucianism, while thinking and writing in a quite different context, do share with their Western counterparts a commitment to tradition and against modernity.

This unresolved tension between liberal and traditional advocates provides a background for the current study. First of all, we can see that the rise of traditionalism over the last four decades comes as no surprise, and neither does its profound rationale. Indeed, in-so-far as current political communities, including liberal democracies and other regimes, fail to cultivate a responsible self in the common life, people will always seek alternative sources of

⁹ For example, Jiang Zemin (江泽民), China's leader from 1989 to 2002, was fond of emphasizing the importance of "rule by virtue," a deeply Confucian theme. Jiang's successor, Hu Jintao (胡锦涛), soon announced his own major initiative to cultivate a "harmonious society". Xi Jinping (习近平), who for many is the most powerful party leader since Mao, proposed a set of so-called "key values of socialism" in which the Confucian concept of harmony is apparent. For a critical analysis of contemporary political discourses in China, see Li Quan, *The Idea of Governance and the Spirit of Chinese Neoliberalism* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 49-78.

¹⁰ In December of 2010, criticism began circulating on Confucian websites of the local government in Qufu City, Shangdong province – the birthplace of Confucius – because it had approved construction of a large Christian church within the city limits.

¹¹ Jiang Qing, *Political Confucianism: The Changing Direction, Particularities and Development of Contemporary Confucianism* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2003).

¹² Kang Xiaoguang, *Kind Politics: The Third Way of China's Political Development* (Singapore: Bafang Press, 2005).

¹³ Fan Ruiping, *Reconstructionist Confucianism: Rethinking Morality after the West* (New York: Springer, 2010), 3.

responsibility from the past. This is not only because the idea of responsibility implies that an agent or community of agents is responding to others, but also because it expresses the fundamental connection between a moral agent and the good she is obligated to pursue.¹⁴ However, as Jeffrey Stout cautions, this somehow romantic turn to traditions of virtue as a better ethical choice than modernity is also very risky, since it could import unjust social or political presuppositions according to modern standards of justice and liberty.¹⁵ For our purposes, this means that, given the significance of responsibility, it is not intellectually or morally preferable to propose an idea simply beyond the horizon of modernity. Therefore, the key issue at stake is *how to connect a moral structure rooted in its admirable traditions with the political structure in its modern forms, while doing justice to the ethos of each*. The sort of comparative project we propose here is uniquely suitable for this question. We agree with the ethicists who see the issue of responsibility at the centre of the conflicting relationships in our common life. Yet we aim to look beyond the simplistic traditional/modern dichotomy that often marks the analysis of traditionalists, even while maintaining a rigorous democratic commitment by addressing multiple sophisticated traditional accounts of responsibility from a cross-cultural perspective.¹⁶

Driven by these fundamental concerns, we aim to discover promising practical theories of responsibility, with the potential to respond to the growing decline in moral responsibility in contemporary societies dominated by the market and the state. Specifically, we consider two moral thinkers, the Christian theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) and the Confucian philosopher Mou Zongsan (牟宗三, 1909-95) and compare their distinct conceptions of responsibility. The two thinkers come from two religious or moral traditions in the modern age. Barth was a theologian in the last century who had a profound influence on the Protestant Church and its theology. Similarly, Mou is widely acclaimed as an accomplished philosopher of New Confucianism, i.e., those scholars who have revived genuine Confucian ideas and extended

¹⁴ Niebuhr once insightfully wrote: “Whatever its peculiar character, the important fact, for our purpose, it that men do seem to poses, among other moral resources, a sense of obligation toward the good, however they may define it. While it may give force to moral judgments, which must be regarded as mistaken from a rational perspective, its general tendency is to support reason against impulse. Historically it is related to both the rational and the impulsive elements in human nature. While it is not undervied, it is at least unique as the capacity for conceptual knowledge. Like conceptual knowledge it may be strengthened and enlarged by discipline, and may deteriorate by lack of use.” Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1960), 38.

¹⁵ Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Though the concept of democracy is subject to various interpretations, here we mean a way of being responsible to other equal and yet different people in shared-governance of public affairs. This version of democracy is inspired by Stout’s defining of democracy as a tradition. He explains, “It inculcates certain habits of reasoning, certain attitudes toward deference and authority in political discussion, and love for certain goods and virtues, as well as a disposition to respond to certain types of action, events, or persons with admiration, pity, or horror.” Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 3. See Chapter 5 for more discussion.

Confucianism to its modern form. Both dedicated their careers to exploring a practical theory of responsibility that would be compatible with their religious or moral convictions, that is, they agreed that *our genuine wills and actions of responsibility can only take form in dialogical relationships with the supreme person(s) and with each other*. This implies that the conception of responsibility is a desire not merely to do something good, but to become good. The latter is defined neither by a state of affairs nor by a set of abstract values. Rather, it must be understood as a dialogical relationship with authentic moral agents – for Barth, Jesus Christ the very Word of God, and for Mou, the Confucian saints.¹⁷ When doing this, both Barth and Mou emphasises the importance of religious or moral identity and of self-criticism, both are sensitive to the internal complexities of religious-moral traditions, and both are open to dialogues with modern discourses of morality as well as various visions of political endeavours. Such positions allow them to stand between the past and present, morality and politics, and be able to fuse different horizons. For these reasons, their moral theories still shed light on our current reflections on the character and practice of responsibility and allow us to develop a constructive position on the ethics of responsibility.

Therefore, we propose the primary research question to guide our comparative and constructive interpretation: *Given their distinct religious or moral traditions, how do Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan understand human responsible wills and actions for individuals and their common life, and moreover, in what ways do their moral theories offer us resources for constructing a new position on the character and practice of human responsibilities?* In practice, we attempt to answer four subsidiary questions. First, in the thought of Karl Barth, what is the meaning and significance of the Christian idea that individuals are called by the divine Word of God to be morally responsible for their lives and the lives of others? Second, in the thought of Mou Zongsan, what is the Confucian concept of responsibility and its significance for the individual and collective pursuit of sainthood? Third, what are the similarities and differences of the two conceptions of responsibility and why are they practically relevant to the common life? Finally, how can these two approaches refine the ethics of responsibility in conversations with its modern and traditional forms in moral philosophies and its extensions in political and

¹⁷ Concerning the evolved meaning of sainthood in the tradition of Confucianism and the related issues in translation, refer to Rodney Taylor, *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism* (Albany: SUNY, 1990), Chapter 3. Here we follow Talyor's translation in our discussion of the thought of Mou Zongsan for two reasons. First, according to Taylor's genealogical study, the word "sage (*sheng*, 圣 or *shengren*, 圣人)" is actually the same word which is used to speak of a saint in English. The problem is mainly a difference of translation in the thought of Confucius, Mencius and neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties. Second, it is relevant to use the word in the thought of Mou Zongsan because Mou himself seems quite affirmative to the religious dimension of Confucianism. For more discussion on this theme, see Sébastien Billioud, *Thinking through Confucian Modernity: A Study of Mou Zongsan's Moral Metaphysics* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), Chapter 6.

social theories? We hope to show that, despite their significant differences, these two thinkers address the above issues in profound ways and further place them at the centre of their moral visions of humanity's common life. To achieve this goal, we shall undertake a thick description of their conceptual arrangements, religious commitments and practical advocates in the proposed study of comparative ethics. We focus on a specific realm of practical theories of responsibility, which allows us to explain the convergence and divergence of these elements in their ethical architectures and raise constructive dialogue between these two thinkers and with those in other fields. We also suggest two bridge concepts – the *source* of responsibility and the *action* of responsibility – as the hermeneutical tool for textual and contextual analysis. The meaning and functions of these concepts will be elaborated in the section on methodology. With the assistance of these conceptual tools, we seek to do justice to the contributions and limitations of the two thinkers and pave the way for a better understanding of responsibility.

1.2 Responsibility and the common life

As Reinhold Niebuhr memorably stated, “It is important to point out that men do possess, among other moral resources, a sense of obligation toward the good, as their mind conceives it. This moral sense does not give content to moral judgments. It is a principle of action which requires the individual to act according to whatever judgments of good and evil he is able to form.”¹⁸ It can be said that the idea of responsibility not only illuminates the very essence of our moral senses, but also provide the modern vocabulary with respect to our moral formation, choice and actions. The proposed project, with the objective of comparing different religious and moral accounts of responsibility, involves an interdisciplinary analytical effort. It requires a thorough survey of philosophical, theological and ethical discussions around the central issue, that is, the nature of responsibility and its significance for the common life. Based on a careful selection of thinkers and serious engagement with their theoretical texts, we offer an intellectual context that shapes the current debates in the field and illuminates the character and potential contributions of our own research.

In this regard, the most important expression of the modern concept of responsibility is the work of Immanuel Kant. Before we explicate Kant's moral philosophy in Chapter 3, here let us consider one of its distinctive features, that is, his insistence on the rational character of responsibility. Kant regards human beings as rational agents, rather than mere animals moved

¹⁸ Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 37.

by desires and inclinations, whose moral development depends on their capacity to respect certain maxims and use them to guide and correct desires. In *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant begins with the idea of the good will, a will which acts from duty alone. As he writes, “Duty is the necessity of action from respect for law.”¹⁹ For Kant, the first moral law or maxim is “Act always on such a maxim as thou canst at the same time will to be a universal law; this is the sole condition under which a will can never contradict itself...”²⁰ Under the demand to universalize our maxims of action, we must then acknowledge this about others: persons are never to be used only as means to other ends. When an agent or group of agents respect these moral laws in all their self-legislating behaviours, as Kant expects, all persons will be members in the Kingdom of Ends.²¹ Here the feeling of respect deserves special attention. While Kant acknowledges that it is crucial for an agent to obey moral laws in practice, as a rationalist moralist he regards it rather as a rational concept and thus insists:

The immediate determination of the will by the law, and the consciousness that my will is subordinated to this, is called respect, so that this is regarded as an effect of the law on the subject, and not a cause of it. Respect is properly the conception of a worth which thwarts my self-love...The object of respect is the law only, that is, the law which impose on ourselves, and yet recognise as necessary itself.²²

It is at this point one might doubt whether a purely rational account is sufficient to support our moral actions of respect, with respect to the universal laws and the humanity of others, if separated from traditions or religious beliefs cultivated in a meaningful communal life.²³

Hence, other modern German thinkers, although maintaining the Kantian imperative of responsibility, tend to put more emphasis on its social character. For instance, Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his Christian ethics understands responsibility as representative action or acting for others. “[The] fact of responsibility as fundamentally a matter of deputyship is demonstrated

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

²² *Ibid.*, 19.

²³ We agree with Niebuhr’s judgment when he writes, “If reverence for law is the essence of this moral sense, as Kant maintained, it must be observed that reason may provide the law but does not, of itself, furnish the reverence.” Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 37. In terms of the source of respect, Kant conceded that without God’s help, a self-centred individual can hardly pursue the interests of others. Thus, the intervention of the divinity is necessary for an agent to reorient her will to obey the moral laws. Using Kant’s own terms, it is the work of “the revolution of the will.” See Kelly Clark and Anne Poortenga, *The Story of Ethics: Fulfilling Our Human Nature* (Pearson college Division, 2003), 84.

most clearly in those circumstances in which a man is directly obligated to act in the place of other men, for example as a father, as a statesman or as teacher.”²⁴ For Bonhoeffer, the archetype of responsibility is nothing but the action of Christ, the One who has acted in our stead. For this reason, the Christian is to act likewise, and the church is obligated for the wider society. It is remarkable to notice that sociologist Max Weber, while using a rather secular vocabulary, had the same insight. Writing on the sense of responsibility in political life, Weber argues that the politician, by virtue of his or her office, must make decisions not simply with respect to absolute moral norms, but in terms of the future effects of present action.²⁵ For these thinkers, the social dimension of responsibility must be valued. Different from Kant, they designate the importance of social roles in assigning responsibility and show that we can bear responsibility for others, acting in their place and for them.²⁶

But the most profound illustration of the social account of responsibility is given by American theologian H. Richard Niebuhr, who offers an ontological explanation. Human beings, in Niebuhr’s reflections, are dialogical creatures, *homo dialogicus*:

In trying to understand ourselves in our wholeness we use the image of part of our activity; only now we think of all our actions as having the pattern of what we do when we answer another who addresses us. To be engaged in dialogue, to answer questions addressed to us, to defend ourselves against attacks, to reply to injunctions, to meet challenges – this is common experience.²⁷

In other words, the self exists in answering and responding to others. Others thus become the necessary condition of being a self. In this light, the idea of responsibility illuminates the very nature of our whole life, since what it means to be a self is enacted in the activities of responding to others. Moreover, in responsive relations with others, the self does not deal with laws but with men and women, who are not atoms but members of a system of interactions. This insight leads Niebuhr to surpass Kant by seeing ethics as a reflection on the human response to the action and nature of God which is crucial for the moral life of the Christian community. As he succinctly states, “Responsibility affirms – God is acting in all actions upon you. So respond to

²⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Collier Books, 1986), 224.

²⁵ Max Weber, *Politics as A Vocation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 505-560.

²⁶ For a fuller discussion of this social account of responsibility see William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 56-58, 86-94.

²⁷ Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1963), 56.

all actions upon you as to respond to his action.”²⁸ Although one might criticise Niebuhr for his anthropological approach to Christian faith, the dialogical configuration of responsibility he offers here is of particular importance for our purposes. It provides a rigorous way to address the connection between individuals’ ultimate concern and the community they are responsible for. This should be counted as the central issue in the formation of the responsible self.

The similar point of view concerning the dialogical relationship between God and humankind is visible in Catholic social teachings. In the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* Pope Paul VI describes the relationship between God and humankind as a “dialogue of salvation.” He states, “The whole history of man’s salvation is one long, varied dialogue, which marvellously begins with God and which He prolongs with men in so many different ways.” For him, the very origin of this dialogue is in the mind of God Himself. The dialogical nature of Christian religion, accordingly, finds its expressions in prayer and revelation. It is in the Incarnation and the Gospel that Christ engages in a conversation with humankind.²⁹ Likewise, the church as the community of God’s people must take up its responsibility – engaging in dialogue with the world in which it lives. To fulfil its mission, the church must learn to listen and speak to its partners, in four concentric circles: the Catholic church, fellow Christians, the practitioners of non-Christian religions, and humankind as a whole.³⁰ As the extended form of God-human dialogue, such conversations are crucial for the search for truth. In his subsequent *Dignitatis Humanae*, Pope Paul further insists: “Truth . . . is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which men explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth.”³¹ In brief, when the dialogical nature of truth seeking is clear, then it becomes a moral duty for all men and women to engage in conversations with God and each other, because only in this way can their very dignity and humanity as social creature be achieved.

Contemporary efforts at a theoretical synthesis of responsibility have been evoked by specific crises. As Hans Jonas contends, the recent technological extension of human power to

²⁸ Ibid., 126.

²⁹ Pope Paul VI, Article 70, *Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Church*, August 6, 1964, Available at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html. For a recent analysis of significance of the document on Catholic political theology, see Matthew Shadle, *Interrupting Capitalism: Catholic Social Thought and the Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

³⁰ Ibid., Article 96-115.

³¹ Pope Paul VI, Article 3, *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, December 7, 1965, Available at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html.

nature and to human society have shown previous beliefs about the ground or source of the moral life to be inadequate; thus, previous forms of ethics are unable to address the moral problems faced by our generation.³² Jonas believes that ethics must fill the vacuum left by the decay of traditional/religious convictions about the source of moral life. It is the recognition that the standard for distinguishing good and evil is an affirmation of being over nothingness. By so doing, Jonas attempts to shift the warrant of ethical values from God to the claim of the finite to exist, which is rooted in the fact of purposiveness and the demands on human freedom.³³ While Jonas presents a normative ethics by means of a principle of responsibility correlated to human power, theological ethicist William Schweiker tends to link it to moral integrity before God. Drawing on classical and contemporary sources, he argues that responsibility is linked to our capacity to reflect upon and then transform our lives through criticism of what we care about. He thus formulates the imperative of responsibility to guide our decisions about how to respond to the domain of values. That is, in all actions and relations we are to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God.³⁴ Here the idea of integrity conveys in contemporary terms the biblical concept of righteousness as the total of goodness. Our lives are morally right and good in so far as they are integrated through faith in the God of righteousness and active in the respect and enhancement of life. Moreover, communities are just when they provide the means to respect and enhance the integrity of persons and the common good. In sum, respecting and enhancing the integrity of life before God is the defining mark of the responsible life.³⁵

These latest efforts at an integrated account of responsibility inspire and justify our own comparative project in terms of its utility, orientation and approach. First, for Christian ethicists and others, responsibility should not be merely understood in individualistic terms as a personal rationality, intuition or revelation. It involves cognition and critical reflection for both individuals and communities. However, the price of articulating such universal accounts of moral philosophy is obvious. In the attempt to move beyond abstract theorization – from modern existentialism to natural-law theology – the constant temptation is to dilute intellectual and moral wisdoms by resorting to a universal account of human moral experiences.³⁶

³² Hans Jonas and David Herr, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of An Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 22-24.

³³ *Ibid.*, 79-116.

³⁴ Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics*, 125-126.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁶ In the case of Schweiker's work, for example, his elaboration of a Christian moral philosophy of responsibility seems lack of a unique message of Christianity, that is, the transformative power of the Christ. This intrinsic weakness is the very price of his pursuing a universal theory of morality.

Therefore, what we pursue here is a deep interpretation of the insights within the boundary of moral or religious traditions. Such a careful comparison between traditions seems a reliable way towards a shared understanding of responsibility. It also allows us to touch the sources and actions of responsibility in different traditions, a crucial issue which is usually marginalized in a universal account.

Moreover, the above ethicists present two distinct emphases in their syntheses of responsibility: divine agency and human agency. Such different ultimate concerns provide useful references for the possible orientations of our own comparison. Similarly, the proposed thinkers, Barth and Mou, hold distinct rigorous and extreme stances according to their traditions. For instance, the theological ethics of Barth is uncompromisingly centred on Jesus Christ as the divine command of God. For Barth, what makes a Christian concept of responsibility unique is that this term expresses the sense of the self to respond to others modelled on the archetype of the covenantal relationship between the triune God and human beings. We believe that the two thinkers in comparison are suitable candidates for expanding our moral horizon.

Finally, as our brief review illustrates, a thorough examination of responsibility requires a substantial input from Christian ethics and from moral outlooks beyond it. It also demands a flexible methodology which enable us to combine the analysis of comparative ethics with religious, philosophical and political dialogues in contexts. Such an approach has gained more credits in the recent work of comparative ethics. Scott Davis stresses that “[c]omparative religious ethics must be willing to erase any disciplinary boundary that blocks the road of inquiry. Whatever comparison we are likely to attempt, it will try to connect two or more figures or phenomena that are thoroughly embedded in time and place. It is essential to incorporate as much history and anthropology into our comparison as possible.”³⁷ As we shall see in the subsequent chapters, when expounding on the ideas of responsibility, both Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan work across those boundaries and engage in dialogues with figures from highly diverse backgrounds. Therefore, to draw full pictures of their conceptual developments and architectures, we need to deal with various dialogues across traditions and disciplines.

1.3 The methodology of comparative ethics

The study of comparative ethics requires an effort at exploring and integrating different moral horizons. This is the interpretive task of “fusion of horizons,” a term linked to philosopher Hans-

³⁷ Scott Davis, “Two Neglected Classics of Comparative Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36, no. 3 (2008): 375-424. See also Scott Davis, *Believing and Acting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Georg Gadamer. Interpretation for him is not a mere method of finding truth, but rather the existential human meeting in the river of history, the fusion of the different horizons of the author and the reader: “Understanding is not to be thought of so much as the action of one’s subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process (strictly happening or occurrence) of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused. This is what must be expressed in hermeneutical theory.”³⁸ Such insistence on thinking within tradition is essential when we approach concrete theories, stances, and attitudes. We regard it as the pre-condition for a meaningful comparative work across traditions.

When we think beyond one religious tradition and learn from others, however, some methodological challenges must be overcome. This is particularly the case when considering Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan because of their strong commitment to the truth claims within their distinct traditions and explicit exclusivist orientations to other traditions. Thus, a justification is required for our engagement with the two thinkers for comparative purposes. For example, Barth’s critiques of religion, natural theology and religious comparison are well known among contemporary theologians. But Joshua Ralston has recently observed that Barth never rejects these concepts and methods unconditionally; it is more suitable to regard Barth’s effort as radical reconstruction for two reasons.³⁹ First of all, Barth finds the fundamental problem of religion as a theological category is that it subsumes the concrete and particular divine revelation under a universal term. As a dogmatic theologian, Barth starts from the particular revelation of God’s action toward human beings. Only then can a theological account of religion and comparative theories of religion be ventured. This account was developed by Barth particularly against 19th-century liberal theologies of religion, which were heavily influenced by Kant. Second, Barth rejects all kinds of natural theology because they are grounded in the analogy of being (*analogia entis*) in manifest or latent manners. The mistake of this theological approach, he said, is evident in its positing an analogical similarity between God and his creation so that human beings can comprehend something of God. Barth cannot allow the general human categories precedes the revelation of divine Word in Jesus Christ. Human reason, analogy, and metaphor can only be authorised insofar as they are focused on

³⁸ Hans Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989), 258. Methodologically, Gadamer acknowledged the problem of historical distance in any effort of fusion of horizons. But he insisted that this fusion must not cover up the tension between past and present. On the contrary, a fruitful way to solve hermeneutical problems is not only to accept the role of tradition and language, but also to explore the positive possibilities of the hermeneutical situation.

³⁹ Joshua Ralston, “Analogies across Faiths: Bartha and Ghazali on Speaking after Revelation,” in Martha L. Moore-Keish and Christian T. Winn, ed., *Karl Barth and Comparative Theology* (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2019), 115-136.

and in service to the understanding of God's self-revelation in Christ. For this reason, Barth strives to articulate the analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*) as a more reliable approach of theological investigation. Given these methodological insights, however, Barth seems to do little empirical work on other major religions and is reluctant to understand their internal traditions. In fact, when he speaks of Buddhism, Hinduism, or Muslims, he tends to rely on crude stereotypes and rarely engages with the specificity of these religions.⁴⁰ In summary, and more pertinent to our objective, Barth's theology might not be equipped to do a comparative project as we venture here, but it is helpful to purify theological accounts of divine revelation centred on Jesus Christ for the sake of better engagement with other religious or moral traditions.

Compared with Barth, Mou Zongsan makes a more substantial effort in understanding and engaging in other religious traditions besides Confucianism. Influences from Buddhism, Daoism, and even Christianity are evident in his historical and philosophical works. As Sébastien Billioud helpfully reminds us, this is because Mou as a Confucian thinker sets a clear agenda for his philosophical enterprise: rethinking and rearticulating key insights of Chinese thought (Confucianism, Daoism and Sinicized Buddhism) through an unavoidable dialogue with the West.⁴¹ In practice, however, this task is often coloured by a Sinocentric ideology that regards Chinese civilisation to be universal in its reach and application, and her neighbouring and distant countries as merely cultural offshoots. This generates, especially when he discusses Christian traditions, a great deal of unreasonable overconfidence and over-simplified critiques. For example, Mou tends to regard the Christian God as a totally transcendent and objective reality, radically separated from human beings. He thus judges that the ethical teachings of Christianity are at best a kind of partial teaching (*lijiao*, 离教) and can hardly cultivate the genuine moral self as can its Confucian counterpart.⁴² From a theological viewpoint, we can easily point out that Mou does not take into account the humanity of God in Jesus Christ and the relevant tradition that emphasises human unity with God evident in the life and works of figures such as St. Irenaeus (130-202) and St. John of the Cross (1542-1591).⁴³ For this reason,

⁴⁰ Francis Clooney, "Foreword: Some Reflections on Barth and Comparative Theology," in Martha L. Moore-Keish and Christian T. Winn, ed., *Karl Barth and Comparative Theology* (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2019), 12-14. For recent positive evaluations of Barth's theology of religions see Glenn Chestnutt, *Challenging the Stereotype: The Theology of Karl Barth as a Resource for Inter-Religious Encounter in a European Context* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010); Sven Ensminger, *Karl Barth's Theology as a Resource for a Christian Theology of Religions* (New York: T&T Clark, 2016).

⁴¹ Sébastien Billioud, *Thinking through Confucian Modernity: A Study of Mou Zongsan's Moral Metaphysics* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 34.

⁴² One famous example is "Manifesto for A Reappraisal of Sinology and the Reconstruction of Chinese Culture, a 1958 document Mou was involved in framing and arguing for a revival of Confucian thought. See Chapter 2.

⁴³ For the critical literature on this topic, see for example Lai Pin Chiu, "Transcendent Immanence and Immanent Transcendence: A Discussion on Mou Zongsan's Differentiation between Christianity and Confucianism," in Liu

even though we agree with Mou's bold claims on the supreme wisdom of the Confucian tradition and Chinese civilisation in general, it is still possible to go beyond his cultural bias and map out constructive dialogue with other religious or moral traditions. Methodologically, we agree with Francis Clooney that a robust comparative study robs us of our stereotypes about other religious or moral traditions and stripes away our unwarranted presumptions about the uniqueness of many of our own religious beliefs and practices. Moreover, a serious comparative study has the capacity to undercut and weaken established, self-privileging positions, thus enabling us to learn from our neighbours patiently, humbly, and sympathetically.⁴⁴

The dilemma faced by rigorous comparisons is then between depth and precision of treatment, on the one hand, and generality of scope, on the other. Many difficulties with past comparisons stem from the quixotic desire to encompass all religions or traditions in one study. The vastness of the ambition inevitably leads to errors of interpretation like overgeneralization and anachronism.⁴⁵ Hence, we choose to narrow the scope of this comparative study and focus more precise attention on the particular objects to be compared. This path has been followed by some illuminating comparative studies, including Lee Yearley's *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage*, Karen Carr and Philip Ivanhoe's *The Sense of Antirationalism: The Religious Thought of Zhuangzi and Kierkegaard*, and, more recently, Aaron Stalnaker's *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine*. By focusing on only a few figures, it is possible to approximate the level of contextualization in specific intellectual history. Moreover, generalizations about single thinkers, especially if they have systematic tendencies (such as Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan), are much more defensible – and can be more effectively qualified as necessary – than generalizations about whole traditions. These benefits make an in-depth comparison of two thinkers around a theme of interest hard to surpass.

The present study aims to continue to develop this mode of comparative ethics. The task of comparing their complicated conceptions and visions requires concrete interpretive tools which we list below. First, this study focuses on the part of ethics that deals with practical theories of responsibility, a unique realm identified and labelled by Yearley in his masterful comparative study of Mencius and Aquinas. Yearley explains that practical theories differ from

Shuxian and Lin Yuehui, ed., *Contemporary Confucianism and Western Culture* (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2005), 43-89; Tang S. K. Andres, "About Mou Zongsan's Interpretation of the Christian Religion," *Jian Dao: A Journal of Bible & Theology*, no. 19 (2003): 59-70; and Lo Ping-Cheung, "Neo-Confucian Religiousness Via-a-vis Neo-Orthodox Protestantism," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41, no. S1 (2014): 609-631.

⁴⁴ Francis Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 13-16.

⁴⁵ A rare exception is Julia Ching's *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study*.

primary theories, which operate at the level of ordinary life and provide explanations that allow people to tackle “normal” problems, such as the selection of proper seasons for planting. They also differ from secondary theories, which appear at the level of metaphysics and explain ultimate reality in terms of a class of beings or powers.⁴⁶ Practical theories, then, function in the intermediate zone between primary and secondary, in other words, between abstract injunctions and living complexities. Their aim is to explain human activities in order to guide practices toward full actualisation of moral principles (for idealists) or ultimate realities (for realists). Practical theories are thus more theoretical than primary theories and meanwhile closer to normal phenomena than secondary theories. The phenomena on which a practical theorist works include sacred texts, beliefs, practices and interpretations.⁴⁷ All these sources are critical for the description of practical theories and are utilized in our analysis. The success of our comparison depends on our recognition of the existence and importance of thinkers’ practical theories that focus on the conceptions of responsibility. With their practical theories, we can probe parallel and illuminating relationships between thinkers, which helps us understand each thinker and the tradition he or she represents.

Second, in order to tease out the concrete conceptions of responsibility, we employ a set of bridge concepts in our interpretive work. As Stalnaker elaborates, bridge concepts are general ideas which can be given enough content to be meaningful and guide comparative inquiry, yet which are open to greater specification in particular cases. They are designed to elicit theoretical formulations in each object compared, including questions and basic orientations, from the disparate elements and details around these anchoring terms. In practice, the selection and refinement of bridge concepts is an inductive process, in order to refrain them from reshaping the terms each thinker uses into some fundamentally new form.⁴⁸ In this study, the major bridge concepts – as listed above – are “the source of responsibility” and “the action of responsibility.” The first refers to the fundamental forces that shape the sense of responsibility within and beyond humanity. The second element means the organisation of a responsible way of life as defined by moral traditions. These interrelated dimensions of responsibility are the conceptual tools to explore the internal structures of distinct moral visions in comparison. The interpretive process is a dialectical one. We will focus on the array of conceptual apparatuses and on the

⁴⁶ Yearley’s conception of practical theories is built on Horton’s analytical distinction between primary and secondary theories. See Robin Horton, “Tradition and Modernity Revisited,” in M. Hollis and S. Luke, ed., *Rationality and Relativism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1982), 201-260; Lee Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 175-177.

⁴⁷ Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, 178.

⁴⁸ Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2006), 17.

rationale of demonstration, which allows an intensive comparison between the two influential theories and the possible fusion of their visions. In practice, a careful reading of the key selected works offers an interpretation concerning the structure of their arguments and underlying assumptions. Such textual analysis, supplemented by the intellectual history of each thinker, can facilitate a contextualized comparison of the conceptions of responsibility in their practical forms.

Third, to facilitate a comparison of different moral visions, it is also useful to explain the concept of “vision” and its interpretive functions. This concept can act as a bridge concept that provides loose focal points around which comparative engagement can take place. According to Sheldon Wolin, two distinct but related senses of “vision” play an important part in political and moral theory.⁴⁹ Vision is commonly used to mean an act of perception, as when a speaker attempts to address a political rally. But “vision” is also used in another sense, as when one talks about an aesthetic vision or a moral vision, to describe the means by which a theorist expresses fundamental values on one hand, and seeks to transcend history on the other.⁵⁰ With this in mind, we define a moral vision as one wherein the moral imagination attempts to mould the totality of principles and phenomena in accordance with some truth that lies beyond the political order and is informed by religious or moral traditions. Specifically, for the moral vision of the common life, we mean an intellectual effort to make the political principles and structure of a communal life accord with some moral truth. The applicability of such visions depends on the depth and breadth of a thinker.

Last but not least, the current study contains a constructive objective based on comparative findings. Specifically, drawing from dialogues across traditions and disciplines, we aim to pave the way for promising versions of responsibility. It is a task of *reflection* on ethical discourse. As Stout indicates, this kind of ethical inquiry is always a normative affair and it is better to ask critical questions of those ethical discourses to which our normative commitment belongs and make explicit their implications.⁵¹ It is thus useful to say that, for a constructive and practical theory of responsibility, its integrity relies on the unity of moral knowledge and moral action and is thus central to our reflections. In the contexts of Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan, several normative issues involved in our judgement include: How do we assess their distinct stress on

⁴⁹ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 17-18.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵¹ Jeffrey Stout, “Commitment and Tradition in the Study of Religious Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 25, no. 3 (1997): 24-30. Another essay with similar methodological concerns and updated literature review is Aaron Stalnaker, “Judging Others: History, Ethics, and the Purpose of Comparison,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36, no. 3 (2008): 425-444.

the practical dimension of responsibility within the teleological or deontological ethical frames? How do we evaluate their effort in integrating the essential teachings of their religious or moral traditions with their democratic commitment to the common life? Were they successful in creating a kind of ethical discourse which connects tradition and democracy so that the purpose and means of moral formation in democratic politics can be articulated? And finally, can their formulations of responsibility assist our virtuous and various actions toward a common life in the context of neoliberal capitalism? By addressing these crucial issues in the subsequent chapters, we intend to explicit the normative commitments of Barth and Mou and extend their insights to our own context.

1.4 Organisation of the study

This study includes six chapters. It proceeds from the contexts and profiles of Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan, to a systematic comparison of their conceptions of responsibility, and finally to the possible integration and extension of their moral visions. Chapter 2 presents a contextual analysis of the circumstances in which the two thinkers did their moral and political thinking. In the biographical evidence, we find a genuine integration of their theories and praxis centred on responsibility. To explain the first comparative aspect, Chapter 3 focuses on the objective and subjective sources of responsibility for human beings in two moral accounts. In critical dialogues with Kant's moral philosophy, both thinkers developed more robust moral accounts of responsibility with distinctive features. This allowed them to engage in the moral horizon of modernity while overcoming its inherent weaknesses. Chapter 4 examines the second aspect of comparison, that is, responsible action. Through conversations with certain forerunners within their traditions, both were able to identify a unique way of moral formation and articulate responsible exercises associated with it. In Chapter 5, we focus on the political conceptions of responsible action developed by Barth and Mou. Encountering democratic socialism in local politics, the two thinkers not only learned the purpose and means of political enterprise, but also enriched its moral vision along with their practical and collective conceptions of responsibility. In the final chapter, we summarise the major comparative findings in the two accounts of responsibility. Drawing on the key insights from Barth and Mou, we raise a dialogue with contemporary moral and political thinkers, seeking a promising version of responsibility in common life that will guide our contextual and virtuous action in neoliberal China.

Chapter 2

The Contexts and Concerns of Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan

2.1 Introduction

As we noted in the first chapter, a promising comparison involves a fusion of different horizons. Thinking within the tradition is critical when we attempt to elaborate the concrete meaning of theories, stances, and attitudes. With these insights, a genuinely comparative study across distant traditions is possible. The task of this chapter, therefore, is a contextual analysis of the life and work of our subjects, namely, Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan. This makes us sensitive to the key events which shape their conceptions of responsibility. It can also illuminate their visions of a responsible life, based on their unique life experiences and reflections within moral traditions. In other words, this is a crucial task if we want to establish a realistic and reliable relationship between their ideas and their lives, and if we want to avoid any temptation regarding anachronism, overgeneralization or rootless imagination.

Indeed, these interpretative temptations are simply irresistible when we look only at their highly abstract and opaque works. Many critics of these two thinkers, either in their lifetimes or afterwards, have fallen into this category by ignoring the practical realm. For instance, one of Barth's most influential critics in the United States, Reinhold Niebuhr, said scornfully, that Barth's theology of crisis was suitable for stimulating moral courage but was unable to provide any concrete moral guidance: "Perhaps this theology is constructed too much for the great crises of history. ... It can fight the devil if he shows both horns and both cloven feet. But it refuses to make discriminatory judgements about good and evil if the evil shows only one horn or the half of a cloven foot."¹ Along these lines, Robin Lovin complained that Barth's moral theology may lose its way when helping persons to make particular, difficult decisions and thus may be unable to deal clearly with public choices when different social groups come into conflict.² Correspondingly, many rejections to Mou's Confucian ethics regarded his definition of humanity as over-optimistic and unable to provide realistic guidance for democratic practice.³ In our view, these judgements are partial and suspicious. This chapter's biographical findings

¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, "We Are Men and Not God," *Christian Century*, 27 October 1948, 1139.

² Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Faith and Public Choices: The Social Ethics of Barth, Brunner, and Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 22-42.

³ For instance, Wei, Zhengtong, *Confucianism and Modern China* (Shanghai: People's Press, 1990), 112; Chang, Hao, *The Consciousness of Darkness and Democratic Tradition* (Beijing: New Star Press, 2006).

regarding Barth's and Mou's theory-praxis relationships allow us to respond to such one-sided charges. With slightly different emphases, the textual findings in Chapter 5 will provide more evidence on the practical dimensions of their conceptions of responsibility.

Our central argument here goes much further. We are prepared to demonstrate a genuine integration of their theories and praxis centred on responsibility. Their life stories provide useful evidence to illustrate that they are neither typical ivory-tower scholars nor public intellectuals in the general sense. Instead, they are no less than serious practitioners of responsibility in both intellectual and social-political realms in accordance with their traditions. To prove this, we need to examine their work and lives carefully in different cultural and political contexts; specifically, we draw attention on their political engagements as well as to their underlying ethical considerations. This provides a close reading of their perceptions of responsible actions. Also, we distinguish several kinds of political regimes they proposed and rejected. A constitution-based social democracy, as we shall see, was the only form of political arrangement on which Barth and Mou agreed, although for entirely different reasons.⁴ This political vision shed light on their practical accounts of responsibility.

Admittedly, the life stories told here are neither original nor comprehensive. Our narratives include only major events and experiences relevant to our analytical objectives. Thanks to the multitude of their reflections, letters, and autobiographies, many pieces of their life are now available and can be read from a first-person perspective.⁵ Biographical works by professional analysts and chronicles compiled by loyal disciples also provide reliable second-hand information.⁶ With the help of these valuable materials, we can now approach the internal and

⁴ Here we follow Dorrien and do not distinguish "social democracy" and "democratic socialism" in terminology. He indicates that the varieties of the social democratic movement can be identified by different advocates, beliefs and norms, and practical agenda rather than terminologies. See Gary Dorrien, *Imagining Democratic Socialism: Political Theology, Marxism, and Social Democracy* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2019), 1-26.

⁵ For the part of Barth, his autobiographic writings for *Christian Century* and a large number of correspondences between him and his friends are most valuable first-hand materials. See Karl Barth, *How I Changed My Mind* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press), 1969; Karl Barth, *Letters 1961-1968*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). For Mou Zongsan, his autobiography in his middle age is the only source to study his early life. See in detail Mou Zongsan, *Autobiography at Fifty* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015).

⁶ Among numerous professional studies on Barth life, the authoritative one is Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1976). Several biographies on the politics of Barth are worth mentioning here. They are: Timothy Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Frank Jehle, *Ever against the Stream: the Politics of Karl Barth, 1906-1968*, trans. Richard and Martha Burnett (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002); and George Hunsinger, "Conclusion: Toward a Radical Barth," in George Hunsinger Ed., *Karl Barth and Radical Politics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976). In comparison to Barth, the complete record of Mou's life are more accessible in his *Autobiography at Fifty* and his chronicle made by his students. See Cai Renhou, "An Academic Chronicle of Mou Zongsan," *The Complete Works of Mou Zongsan, Vol. 32* (Taipei: Ehu Publishing, 1989). Mou also summarises the intellectual progress of his whole life in an essay entitled "A Philosophical Road: My Intellectual Development," *TF* II, 401-412. For his scholarly biography one can refer to Li, Shan, *A Biography of*

external worlds of these two thinkers more efficiently. In the next section, we first present a summary of the work and life of Karl Barth. Then we offer a brief introduction to the life and context of Mou Zongsan. Finally, we discuss some definitive parallels between Barth and Mou in their intellectual and political visions. In this way, our findings not only dismantle the previous charges against them but also suggest promising prospects for comparison; that is, regarding fundamental concerns of responsibility in the practical realm, we can read Barth as a theological Mou, and Mou as a Confucian Barth.

2.2 Karl Barth: a Swiss voice of the Word

Karl Barth was born in Basel, Switzerland, on May 10, 1886. He was the eldest son of Fritz Barth, a minister of the Swiss Reformed Church and then Professor of New Testament and Early Church History at the University of Bern. His mother, Anna Sartorius, was the daughter of a local renowned minister. Reared and educated in a well-established middle-class family, young Barth soon found himself attracted to history and drama rather than mathematics and science. His passion for systematic theology in particular was kindled when he underwent instruction for confirmation at his sixteen years old.⁷ Two years later, Barth began his theological studies first at the University of Bern, then at Berlin, Tübingen, and Marburg. At Berlin, he attended the seminar of the prominent liberal theologian and historian Adolph von Harnack (1851-1930). At Marburg, he came under the influence of neo-Kantian theologian Wilhelm Herrmann (1846-1922), whom he later confessed to being *the* theological teacher of his student days and through whom Barth became vitally interested in German modern liberal theology and the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834).⁸ Barth graduated in 1908 and decided to serve as a vicar or assistant minister in Geneva.

The next decade of pastoral service was the formative period of Barth's life. In 1911, he was ordained as the pastor of the Reformed Church of Safenwil, a small village in north-central Switzerland. He then married a talented violinist, Nelly Hoffmann, and they later had one daughter and four sons. Barth spent ten years at Safenwil as a pastor of textile workers and farmers. Here the young pastor was concerned not only with sermons and preaching, but also

Mou Zongsan (Beijing: Minzu University Press, 2002). Last, Mou's student Liu Yuehui records some pieces of his personal life during 1985-1995, indicating that there was a subtle change in his philosophical and religious position in his late years. See Lin Yuehui, "Fallen Leaves Return to the Roots: My Reflections on Mou Zongsan's Religious Mind," *Reflexion* 13 (Taipei: Linking Publishing, 2009), 149-157.

⁷ See Barth own reflection in his article, "On Systematic Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 14, no. 3 (1961): 225.

⁸ Karl Barth, *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920-1928* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 238.

with the working conditions faced by the repressed, exploited labourers. He thus became involved in the labour union movement, a political movement led by religious socialists Hermann Kutter (1863-1931) and Leonhard Ragaz (1868-1945), as well as Christoph Blumhardt the younger (1842–1919) whom Barth came to visit later. The meeting with Blumhardt proved to be a significant event for Barth. From this Moravian preacher, he gained a stunning conviction about the victorious reality of Christ's resurrection, which afterward played the central role in his entire theological systems.

Meanwhile, the responsibilities of practical ministry made Barth more and more restless over his liberal theological orientation. The turning point took place in the early days of the First World War when ninety-three German intellectuals – among them many of his former teachers – announced their public support for the war policies of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Deeply shocked and disillusioned by the collapse of their ethics, Barth began to question liberal theology, with its rationalist and historicist roots. Through his study of Paul's letter to the Romans, he gradually clarified the message of the gospel to the power of the state and the condition of the poor.⁹ In 1915, Barth decided to become a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD). From then on, the Safenwil workers began to call him "comrade pastor" because of his stand on social issues. However, in his mind, religious socialism could not be completely identified with true Christianity. Even so, his critical assessment of the movement did not stop him declaring his solidarity with the workers.¹⁰

Barth's first major theological work, *Der Römerbrief* or *The Epistle to the Romans* was published in 1919. The second edition appeared three years later. This publication established his position as one of the most critical and creative theologians of the new generation. Barth in 1921 was appointed Professor of Reformed Theology at the University of Göttingen; later, he was named to professorships at Münster and Bonn. In the following years, Barth undertook an exhaustive study of the great Protestant theologians like John Calvin, to the Catholic theological

⁹ Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1962), 33-48.

¹⁰ In his lecture "War, Socialism and Christianity" delivered as a new party member on 14 February 1915, Barth addressed, "He made it clear that since war had broken out, both Christianity and socialism were in need for 'reformation' and that each required the other. 'A real Christian must become a socialist (if he is to be in earnest about the reformation of Christianity!). A real socialist must a Christian if he is in earnest about the reformation of socialism.'" During the same year, Barth also gave several lectures on "Christ and Social Democracy", "The Future of Social Democracy in Switzerland" and "What does it mean to be a socialist?" In these lectures Barth stresses that a socialist is one who is a socialist at heart. Ibid., 83. Barth later reflects regretfully in his letter to Thurneysen, "Once I was a religious socialist. I discarded it because I believed I was that religious socialism failed to take as serious and profound a view of man's misery, and of the help for him, as do the Holy Scriptures." Karl Barth, *God in Action* (New York: Round Table Press, 1936), 125. See also Chapter 5 for Barth's more critical reflections on the movement of religious socialism.

giant Thomas Aquinas, and church fathers such as St. Anselm. It was particularly the latter whose work convinced Barth that a robust epistemological method of theology is nothing but “faith seeking to understand.”¹¹ During the fall of 1922, Barth along with Thurneysen, Friedrich Gogarten, and Georg Merz decided to found a journal called *Zwischen den Zeiten* or *Between the Times*, as the intellectual base of their common theological statements marked by “dialectical theology” or the “theology of the crisis.” The journal soon succeeded in playing a leading role among younger generations of German theologians. During this relatively peaceful period, Barth’s work was productive and fruitful. It is worth noting that, among many exegetical, historical and dogmatic publications, two important ethical works appeared based on his lectures at Münster and Bonn. The first was a thin volume entitled *The Holy Spirit and The Christian Life* in 1926, and the other his two-volume *Ethics* in 1928.¹² In his lectures on ethics, particularly, Barth had already noticed that there is “no greater danger for the modern state that is mobilizing one of the national traditions – raised and united with the state – against others.”¹³ Unfortunately, far beyond the imagination of Barth and his German contemporaries, the danger was precipitated with breath-taking speed.

The political and cultural climate fundamentally changed along with the rise of National Socialism in the early 1930s. So did Barth’s life and work. As a member and teacher of the German church, Barth found the church itself in great danger concerning its doctrine and order, when it attempted to set up the dominion of German Christians and implicitly accepted the anti-Semitism promoted by the Nazi government. What is worse, the majority of German Christian communities, across the theological spectrum, tended to affirm this reality, holding a neutral or even tolerant attitude to it. With the accession of Adolf Hitler to power in early 1933, Barth could not keep silent, feeling he had to alert the imperilled church to struggle with adulterous ideologies. Since then, Barth became deeply involved in the struggle. In 1934, he helped found the Confessing Church, resisting the attempt to merge Christian faith with German nationalist identity. Until he was expelled from Germany, Barth continued to work as a theological counsellor of the Confessing Church. The Theological Declaration of Barmen, largely based on a draft Barth had prepared, was ratified on May 31, 1934. The document expressed his conviction that holding fast to the true doctrine of Christianity – namely, the exclusiveness of

¹¹ See Karl Barth, *Anselm, Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm’s Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1960). Barth himself regards his as the one written with the greatest satisfaction. To a large degree, Anselm’s dictum helped Barth remove the last remnants of anthropological foundation and exposition of Christian doctrine. Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, 42-43.

¹² The lecture on ethics was not initially published according to Barth’s will. See Translator’s Preface, in Karl Barth, *Ethics*, eds. Dietrich Braun, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 326.

God's revelation in Jesus Christ – was the only way to resist effectively the secularizing and paganizing of the church in Nazi Germany. As the first few theses state:

Christ, as he is attested for us in the Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.

We reject the false doctrine, as though there were areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ, but to other lords...

We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church were permitted to abandon the form of its message and order to its own pleasure or to changes in prevailing ideological and political convictions...

We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single totalitarian order of human life... ¹⁴

Specifically, concerning the normative role of the state Barth declared: "the State has by divine appointment the task of providing for justice and peace and fulfils this task, according to the measure of human insight and human ability, using the threat and exercise of force." In other words, he demands here a constitutional state, in sharp contrast to the totalitarian state and its ideology. Correspondingly, he urged that the church must not only "acknowledges the benefit of this divine appointment," but also remind people of "the Kingdom of God, God's commandment and righteousness, and thereby the responsibility both of rulers and of the ruled."¹⁵ Here the public claims of the church and its active relationship to the state were discussed pointedly. For Barth, it is the very responsibility of every single Christian and the whole Christian community to seek the best interest of the civil community even if such an

¹⁴ See The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, *Book of Confessions* (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 1994), 257.

¹⁵ Ibid.

effort seems costly.¹⁶ In an article later published by *The Christian Century*, Barth shared with his American readers his deep concern behind his indignant resistance:

What was and what is at stake? Simply this, to hold fast to and in a completely new way to understand and practice the truth that God stands above all gods, and that the church in Volk and society has, under all circumstances, and over against the state, her own task, proclamation, and order, determined for her in the Holy Scriptures. Despite the fact that even today many in the Confessional Church will not see and admit it, there could have been no other outcome that this truth of the freedom of the church, despite the claims of National Socialism, should come to signify not only a “religious” decision, not only a decision of church policy but also and *ipso facto* a political decision. A political decision, namely, against a state which as a totalitarian state cannot recognise any task, proclamation, and order other than its own, nor acknowledge any other God than it itself, and which therefore in proportion to its development had of necessity to undertake the oppression of the Christian church and the suppression of all human right and freedom.¹⁷

Barth’s theological stance towards the Third Reich, however, discomfited many, even friends and opponents. The Confessing Church deliberately marginalised Barth and distanced itself from him. For them, Barth’s crusade against the Nazi government caused huge difficulties in managing the subtle balance between the church and the state in Germany. In 1934, another dialectical theologian, Emil Brunner (1889-1966) of Zürich, published his work *Nature and Grace*, in which he gently but resolutely stood against Barth’s approach to natural theology. Soon Barth wrote a response to Brunner, the polemical pamphlet *No! An Answer to Emil Brunner*. In his view, any attempt at natural theology is dangerous support for the order and anti-Semitism of the German Christians fashioned by the new ideology of National Socialism. This rejection proved to be a painful breakup between Barth and Brunner (and many others of

¹⁶ David Haddorff, *Christian Ethics as Witness: Barth’s Ethics for a World at Risk* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), 149.

¹⁷ See Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, 46-7. Barth never confined his criticism against National Socialism with the boundary of Germany, he rather saw the similar hegemony and fear pervades in the other European countries. In the same article, Barth made this observation quite critically, “The lies and brutality, as well as the stupidity and fear, grew and have long since grown far beyond the frontiers of Germany. And Europe does not understand danger in which it stands. Why not? Because it does not understand the First Commandment. Because it does not see that National Socialism means the conscious, radical, and systematic transgression of this First Commandment, Because it does not see that this transgression, because it is sin against God, drags the corruption of the nations in its wake.” Ibid., 47.

the school of dialectical theology).¹⁸ During the same period, Barth decided to join the Social Democratic Party, which was currently under attack in Germany from the extreme right as well as the extreme left. However, with Hitler's seizure of power, such a "practical political decision" was at risk. In the spring of 1933, Barth was officially asked by the minister of education to withdraw his membership from the party or leave his post as a professor at the university. In response to this threat, Barth declared that "the demand to withdraw from the SPD as a requirement for carrying on his teaching responsibilities" was impossible. Acknowledging the complete prohibition of the SPD in June, Barth regarded himself as "perhaps the last member of the SPD in the Third Reich."¹⁹

Finally, since Barth refused to take the oath of allegiance to Hitler, which was required of all professors, he lost his chair in Bonn in 1935. Later in the same year, he was expelled from Germany by the Nazi government. In his native Basel, Barth then was offered the chair of theology at the University so he could continue his teaching and research. However, through the end of the Second World War, he never stopped championing the cause of the Confessing Church, of the Jews, and of the people suffered in political turbulence. In a letter to *The Christian Century*, Barth reviewed his active political involvements in Switzerland.

So in these years I joined a kind of secret organisation for defence in case of an invasion. As a member of the Society for Aid to the Confessional Church in Germany I was among those who cooperated with Paul Vogt, that tireless pastor who with endless patience, and in many cases successfully, cared for foreign refugees, especially Jewish refugees. On my own responsibility I spoke and wrote against Hitler and for Swiss freedom, as well as I could and as far as the police and our careful government's censorship allowed me breath. And finally at 54 I became a more or less regular soldier – probably not too good or generous a fighter, but still a soldier, armed and drilled – and as such I did sentry duty and kept a lookout for Hitler's hellish hosts along the Rhine, on the Jura, and elsewhere.²⁰

¹⁸ In retrospect, Barth later confessed, "A painful change which has come about in the last ten years has involved the loss of a host of theological neighbours, co-workers, and friends who I still possessed in 1928. It was not by death that I lost them but simply on account of this – that they and I, little by little or all at once, found ourselves unable to work together any more in the harmony of one mind and one spirit. We quite differently got on different roads. We are still travelling those different roads today, and at best can only greet one another from afar." Ibid., 41.

¹⁹ Busch, *Karl Barth*, 225.

²⁰ Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, 53.

What Barth subtly put in the letter was a grave reality during those critical years. The Swiss government alerted this difficult theologian that his political speech would offend the regime in Berlin and thus undermine the neutrality of the country. When Barth refused to cooperate, the federal council decided to undertake strict censorship, even illegally tapping the telephone at Barth's home. Therefore, plenty of Barth's lectures were suppressed by the censors. In August 1941, all Swiss were celebrating the 650th anniversary of the confederation agreement. Barth seized this precious opportunity to give a touching lecture to the thousands of young people gathering in Gwatt. He reminded them that the most severe problem for Switzerland was not the military threat, but fear, out of which it might accommodate too readily to the external threat. The country might lose its individuality and also its right to existence. He criticised the restrictions on freedom of press and speech that had been instituted under German pressure. To Barth, especially offensive was secret censorship. "Swiss neutrality, as one of a free alliance of free states, [stands and falls] by having a public mind which can be newly formed again and again by an open consideration of the facts and by an open discussion by the Swiss themselves...What then is the purpose of covering up, more and more eagerly, the mouths and ears of the Swiss people?"²¹ He believed that free public discourse was crucial for democracy if it was to be worthy of its name. Barth spoke fearlessly until the government completely banned his speech near the end of the war.

In 1944, as the war took a turn for the Allies, the defeat of Germany and the end of the Third Reich was only a matter of time. Barth began to think about a new direction in his relationship to Germany. He was probably the first to call for a new, post-Hitler friendship with the German people, against their rejection and condemnation. In Jesus Christ, he said, the reconciliation of our sins is meant for Germans, even Hitler's supporters. For this reason, during the summer semesters of 1946 and 1947, Barth returned Bonn the very place he had lost his chair in disgrace, to present his works on Christian doctrine before many students. There he was able to make live and promising contacts with young theologians. Barth also visited many German cities to speak, resuming old contacts and making new ones. The German reconstruction struck Barth as deep and vast. He was at a crossroads: either return Germany to handle this complicated task or go back to his theological work, namely, the continuation of *Church Dogmatics*, which he had started in 1932. He decided to concentrate on the latter, which he regarded as a more pressing obligation.²²

²¹ Karl Barth, *Eine Schweizer Stimme 1938-1945* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 223.

²² Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, 56.

Just one year later, the cloud of the Cold War began to cover Europe, which was divided into Western and Eastern blocs. Under Stalin, The Soviet aggressively established a band of dependent satellite states on its western border. The overwhelming fear of communism soon substituted for that of National Socialism. On this occasion, many expected Barth to raise his voice against communism as strongly as he had against Nazism. However, Barth disappointed them. He did not make a single speech or lecture along these lines. Instead, in early 1948 he accepted an invitation from the Reformed Church in Hungary, a country suffering political upheaval due to its inclusion in the Eastern Bloc. His task consisted of making statements and addresses about how the church should deal with the new Communist regime. However, in the course of his journey, he convinced his Hungarian friends that the most urgent duty of the church was to undertake a serious campaign to evangelise the lost and bewildered people. Unsurprisingly, Barth's stand on communism and his solidarity with the Hungary church was offensive in his homeland and attracted much accusation and reproach. In a famous but also widely misunderstood Sunday speech, Barth explained his seemingly odd attitude to communism:

One cannot say about communism what one had to say ten years ago about National Socialism, namely, that what it means and intends is pure stupidity, the monster of insanity and crime. It now really makes no sense at all to mention Marxism even for one moment in the same breath with the "ideology" of the Third Reich, or a man of the stature of Joseph Stalin with such charlatans as Hitler, Goring, Hess, Goebbels, Himmler, Ribbentrop, Rosenberg, Streicher, etc. What has been tackled in Soviet Russia – albeit with very dirty and bloody hands and in a way that rightly outrages us – is, after all, a constructive idea, the solution of a problem which is a serious and burning problem for us as well, and we with our clean hands have not yet tackled anything like it energetically enough, namely, the social problem. ... as long as there is still a "freedom" in the West to organize economic crises, a "freedom" to dump our grain into the sea here while people there are starving, so long as such things can happen, we Christians, at least, must refuse to hurl an absolute "No" at the East.²³

What Barth attempted to explain to his audience in the West Bloc, patiently and vigorously, is that Marxist Russia's degeneration into an inhuman system was not certainly according to

²³ Karl Barth, "The Church between East and West," *AS*, 139-140.

the will of its founders. It is possible to start from Marx and develop in a different direction, as the German social democrats once did. However, the hatred of Russia, Barth said, must not mask the existing social question. For Barth, the only real defence against communism is to create just social conditions acceptable for all layers of the population. In other words, Barth rejected a cheap anti-communism. However, what Barth was much more concerned with was the ecumenical movement of the church beyond political and ideological confrontations. In his personal correspondence with Josef L. Hromadka (1889-1969), a Czech theologian who was himself affiliated with Communist ideology and who regarded the Russian Revolution of 1917 an “event of salvation”, Barth made clear his position:

Dear Joseph, do you not realise that Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, and other western fathers defend their western outlook with the same method and in the same style, and being able to do this they bring on the scene their crusade against Communism, so that you and they are waging the “cold war” in just the same way? ... How shall we then ..., as long as such declarations are coming from you, make it clear to the Christian and secular world on this side of the iron curtain that the issue for us (and basically for you, too, is it not?) is neither an anti-Communist peace nor a Communist peace but the peace of God that surpasses all understanding – and therefore justice (in the biblical sense of the word) both against all and for all?²⁴

In his later years, Barth remained active in theoretical work and social activities. He was devoted to the writing of *Church Dogmatics*. He also made regular visits to the prison in Basel and gave sermons to prisoners. Although the whole work would not be finished until his retirement, it eventually grew to thirteen and a half volumes and more than six million words. Widely regarded as one of the most important theological works of the twentieth century, it is the pinnacle of Barth's achievement as a theologian. In this *magnum opus*, he repeatedly affirms, the essence of the Christian message as the overwhelming love of the transcendent God who

²⁴ Barth, *Letters*, 82-83. Quoted from Jehle, *Ever against the Stream*, 98. It is worth noting that Barth also raised a criticism against the dominant intellectual orientations in the West during the Cold War. “... what kind of Western philosophy and political ethics – and unfortunately even theology – was it whose wisdom consisted of recasting the Eastern collective man into an angel of darkness and the Western ‘organisation man’ into an angel of light? And then with the help of such metaphysics and mythology (the fact of an Eastern counterpart is no excuse!) bestowing on the absurd ‘cold war’ struggle its needed higher consecration? Were we so unsure of the goodness of the Western cause and of the power of resistance of Western man that we could bring ourselves to admit only senselessly unequal alternatives – freedom and the dignity of man as against mutual atomic annihilation – then venture to pass off just this latter alternative as a work of true Christian love?” Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, 64.

gives himself to humankind in unconditional freedom and grace. Converted and renewed, one needs to enter into the service of God's work and become a witness on earth. That means she must accept her personal responsibility and public responsibility. Here, a careful reader can see Barth's life and work: as a pastor in Safenwil struggling for workers and farmers, as a professor in Bonn in the conflict with National Socialism, as an activist in Switzerland fighting for national security and civic freedom, and as an ambassador between the East and the West for an ecumenical movement. In short, the witness of Barth was an amazing combination of evangelical passion and political concern. Barth died on December 10, 1968, at age 82.

As a Reformed theologian, Barth made a great impact on the general theological landscape of the twentieth century and beyond. Pope Pius XII called him the greatest theologian since Thomas Aquinas. Even during his lifetime, Barth's work attracted interest and discussion not only across Christian denominations but also in the intellectual and cultural world. He had a profound influence on many modern theological figures such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thomas F. Torrance and Jürgen Moltmann, and on novelists such as John Updike and Miklós Szentkuthy. His works on Christian political ethics have continually been discussed and debated among ethicists such as Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, Jacques Ellul, Oliver O'Donovan, and George Hunsinger.

2.3 Mou Zongsan: the lonely new Confucian

Mou Zongsan was born on April 25, 1909, to a well-off family in a small village of Shandong. The homeland of Confucius, the province still had a traditional atmosphere as late as the early twentieth century. Mou's father was an innkeeper and an admirer of Chinese traditional learning. As the third son of the family, Mou at fifteen followed the customs of leaving his home to study and pursue a career as part of the literati. He performed relatively well in English and mathematics compared with his awkward grammar and writing in traditional literature. In 1929, he enrolled in the department of philosophy at Beijing University. What surprised and attracted him was the intellectual environments of the campus: Beijing University was the frontier of modern culture and academics. Scholars and students were passionate about absorbing and debating new knowledge from the West. Young Mou, like the other students in philosophy, soon developed a keen interest in mathematical logic, influenced by the English philosophers Bernard Russell and Alfred Whitehead. He made a massive study of their *Principia Mathematica*, as well as Whitehead's *Process and Reality*. His strong tastes in Chinese classics also led him to the ancient *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*, 《易经》) and its hermeneutical history.

Such an odd combination made him particularly unpopular with his friends and teachers since the general orientation of the university during that time was vigorously anti-traditional. However, the peer pressure never stopped this lonely student's steady moving forward. Finally, when he graduated in 1933, Mou managed to publish his lengthy essay on *Yijing* at his own expense. In the same year, he married a farmer's daughter, and they had two sons.

Compared to his academic studies, Mou Zongsan's off-campus intellectual experiences seem to have shaped his future more profoundly. Two events were particularly important. In the early 1920s, Liang Qichao (梁启超, 1873-1929), a leading public intellectual and influential political activist, published a post-war travelogue, containing a serious charge: that scientific optimism had collapsed. Zhang Junmai (张君勱, 1887-1969), another leading figure and political philosopher of new Confucianism, then sparked the great Debate on Science and the Philosophy of Life. Along with Liang, Zhang scoffed at the abuse of scientific methods in the understanding of human life and its purposes, suggesting a metaphysical approach in accordance with Chinese moral tradition. Such a traditionalist stance soon attracted criticism from the liberal modernist camp.²⁵ When Mou entered university, Beijing's intellectual circle was still centred on the controversy about the superiority of scientism and metaphysics in decoding the meaning of life. After a close reading of each key text, Mou found that the traditionalist argument gradually convinced him that human morality, as well as its ultimate concerns, was a unique realm that science could not critique or counter. It is thus not exaggerating to say that the encountering of this debate opened a new window for Mou's young philosophical mind. However, it was his later meeting with Xiong Shili (熊十力, 1885-1968) that opened a new horizon before him. In the winter of 1932, Xiong accepted the chair of traditional Chinese philosophy at Beijing University. His recently published *New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness* (*Xin Weishi Lun*, 《新唯识论》) established him as one of the most original thinkers of the day and a well-known apologist for the Confucian moral tradition.²⁶ The young student Mou occasionally met his teacher during a table talk among

²⁵ For the progress of the debate, as well as its intellectual background and influence, see Benjamin I. Schwartz, "Themes in intellectual history, May Fourth and after," in Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China Volume 12: Republican China 1912-1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 406-451. For the key texts of the rival camps see Ding Shouhe, ed., *The Enlightenment Thoughts in Modern China* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 1999), 528-577. Some of the selected texts are available for English readers. See Theodore de Bary and Richard Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition, Volume II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 370-376. For the intellectual heritage of this debate on new Confucianism and Mou Zongsan in particular, Chang Hao's analysis is the most profound and instructive one. See Chang Hao, "New Confucianism and the Intellectual Crisis of Contemporary China," in Charlotte Furth, ed., *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 325-356.

²⁶ As the title of his *opus magnum* shows, Xiong's philosophical system has intricate connection with Yogācāra

several professors. Deeply impressed by Xiong's intellectual brevity and authenticity, Mou decided to follow him in the inquiry of moral metaphysics. Many years later, Mou still remembered his first impressions:

I felt that I had met an authentic person, and for the first time I sensed the meaning of knowledge and life. I recognised then that my daily thoughts were fleetingly shallow, chaotic, aggrandized, and far from being knowledge (*xuewen*, 学问). Authentic character and authentic life were yet to emerge in me. I was just rolling habitually in a slumber. Hearing Mr. Xiong's lion roar was like receiving a jolting wake-up call, which turned my gaze and thoughts from chasing superficial, external pursuits to shining a spotlight on myself. This spotlight revealed my "reality" and showed where my thought has stagnated. ... The radiant appeal of Mr. Xiong's original life, his strong sense of family, country, and nation, were what opened up the source of my life, forever providing me with something to strive for and keeping me from regressing. I thus sincerely experienced the continuity of the life of wisdom. Mr. Xiong's life was a radiant life of wisdom. In that time and age, he was the only person who could, without any alienation, directly connect with the grand life grown out of the tradition formed since the time of the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi, 黄帝), Yao (尧), and Shun (舜). That grand life embodies the union of national life and cultural life.²⁷

During that period, Beijing had just been captured by the new-established Republican government. As the northern political centre of the country, this old city was marked by many political campaigns and social movements. Both ambitious parties – the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – sought to recruit new members among the educated youth.²⁸ As a college student, Mou was hardly be immune to party mobilization. He soon became a probationary member of the KMT. Every summer term he travelled home and assisted

Buddhism. He re-evaluated the Chinese philosophical tradition through the Buddhist perspective which undergone a recent revival in the school of so-called "Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*, 人间佛教)." See Xiong Shili, *New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1938). In this respect, one can easily discern that Xiong himself set an intellectual example for his students and followers such as Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan. In the case of Mou Zongsan, since his middle age he started to engage into various streams of Chinese Buddhism and appropriate them to upgrade traditional Confucian theoretical approaches. The most important works during this period are his two-volume *Buddha-Nature and Prajñā* (1982) and *Theory of Perfect Good* (1985).

²⁷ Mou Zongsan, *AF*, 119-120, 143.

²⁸ The first cooperation between the two political parties started from 1924 and ended in 1927. For details of the political struggles in Beijing at that time see Martin Wilbur, "The final drive – Peking captured and Nanking the new capital," in Twitchett and Fairbank, *The Cambridge History of China Volume 12*, 697-720.

in organizing grassroots-level campaigns. His integrity and austerity made his speeches very persuasive. However, in the course of political engagement, he felt more and more uneasy with the abstract, extreme, and doctrinal contents in the party's propaganda. His self-criticism went even deeper, questioning such selfless political devotion by intellectuals.²⁹ Somehow disillusioned, Mou decided to withdraw from the KMT and turn to the National Socialist Party (*guojia shehui dang*, 国家社会党), the third force of social democracy in the context of China.³⁰ Influenced by Zhang Junmai, the founder and leader of the NSP, Mou started to oppose both capitalism and communism, meanwhile advocating for separation of powers, freedom of expression, social justice and human rights. Throughout his early years and afterwards, Mou kept these commitments in his political involvements. Just after his graduation, Mou moved to Tianjin and became a frequent writer for the party organ *Renaissance* (*Zaisheng*, 《再生》). In 1937, at twenty-nine, he took over as editor-in-chief.

The subsequent ten years for Mou were a period of turmoil. The young republic was still fractured and in the hands of regional military strongmen. The central government under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek (蒋介石, 1887-1975), however, was desperate to exterminate the Communist Party and its forces. The situation got even worse with the Japanese invasion of the early 1930s. For many Chinese people, including Mou himself, this was a typical period so-called “inner affliction and outer tumult (*neiyou waihuan*, 内忧外患).” In July 1937, Japan launched total war against China, which proved an opportunity for the insurgency of the Communist Red Army. It was not safe for Mou to stay in the eastern coastal cities. He chose to move inland with other university students, preparing for a teaching job. Even in retreat, Mou did not give up encouraging and stimulating young students according to the classical teachings. He also reminded them to avoid left-leaning temptations. However, these actions were soon

²⁹ Mou later tended to regard it as the syndrome of romanticism prevailing his era. With a rather regretful tone, he recorded his early experiences as a probationary party member: “I name this phenomenon as the spirit of super-romanticism, and the age of mine as the age of super-romanticism. The cultivation of selfless devotion was undertaken in just this background, nevertheless, from the very beginning that cultivation was not derived from one's moral self-consciousness, but was formed by political ideals and party actions. Therefore, it can hardly be any kind of moral awareness of the inner self. It is rather a form of life driven out by some collective actions with external objectives. This is a pseudo-morality which has been forced out of life itself, and thus an instrumental morality or the honour among thieves. Surely one can devote himself to some objective ideals he believes, but such a devotion must be derived from his own self-restricted will than materialist indulgence, and it must first maintain a sense of morality within his inner life, and then pursue a selfless devotion. That is the authentic morality and the heart of the sages. The mentality of this super-romantic age is just the opposite, since those formulations of the inner selfless devotion are fundamentally immoral. That is the shadow of morality. That seemingly selfless sages are not true sages, which are simply the shadows of sages. This selflessness is a mixture of good and evil spirits. Based on my own intimate experience of self-liberation and self-enhancement, I began to realise this false realm of sageness.” See Mou, *AF*, 29.

³⁰ The NSP did not connect with the Nazis in Germany. See Chapter 5 for Zhang's distinction between the two parties.

regarded as wishful thinking and as suspicious party propaganda by the university authorities, whom then refused to offer him a teaching place. Mou had no choice but to become a nomad. With a small subsidy from a close friend, he often struggled in extreme poverty, loneliness, and frustration. Besides this, his tough character also caused friction in his relationships with colleagues and superiors, making it harder for him to hold jobs.

However, none of this could prevent him from his devotion to study and from publishing plentifully on philosophy and politics. Although he often had personal conflicts with Zhang Junmai, he remained a loyal contributor to *Renaissance*. His commentaries on current affairs concentrated on the cultural elements of state-building.³¹ Despite these numerous journal articles, his high energy was spent on logic and epistemology. Two major works in his early stage, *The Principles of Logic* (*Lizexue*, 《理则学》) and *Critique of the Cognitive Mind* (*Renshixin zhi pipan*, 《认识心之批判》), were both completed during this period.³² Specifically, the latter marked his original contribution to epistemological issues in a dialogue with Kantian philosophy. The controlling idea of the whole book, which he learnt from his great mentor, was the concept of intellectual intuition (*zhidezhi jue*, 智的直觉). Mou insisted that this essence of traditional Chinese wisdom was an accessible and reliable supra-sensible mode of knowledge, just the attributes that Kant had reserved to God alone.³³ It is also worth mentioning, during the same period, his acquaintance with Tang Junyi (唐君毅, 1909-78), a brilliant Hegelian young philosopher and former student of Xiong Shili. Their intimate friendship, as well as their joint partnership in reviving Confucian philosophy, lasted nearly forty years until Tang's death in 1978.

In 1942, Mou finally found a relatively stable teaching job at China West University in Chengdu. Three years later, he was appointed Professor of Chinese Philosophy at the National Central University, then at Jinling, Jiangnan, and Zhejiang. Just as he was gradually establishing his academic career, the war came to an end. With a grave concern for the prospect of reconstruction, Mou decided to initiate a monthly journal with the title of *History and Culture* (*Lishi yu wenhua*, 《历史与文化》) at his own expense. The journal published only four issues due to financial problems, but it was an admirable effort at circulating and advancing a responsible way of life. The renaissance of the nation, Mou declared, would be impossible without traditional wisdom and morality.

³¹ Most political essays written in the period can be found in Mou Zongsan, *EW*, 629-1018.

³² Cai, "An Academic Chronicle of Mou Zongsan," 8-17.

³³ See Chapter 3.

My country, the Chinese people, cultural life, and the distinctions between Chinese and foreign (*yixia zhibian*, 夷夏之辨), human and beasts (*renqin zhibian*, 人禽之辨), and righteousness and utility (*yili zhibian*, 义利之辨), were my religions at the time. I indeed had religious zeal then. I resolutely opposed anyone who charted a different path by violating or negating my “religion,” and anyone who failed to follow my “religion” to fulfil his or her duty to establish a nation that would most perfectly realise the Chinese people’s Xing-nature. ... Young people leaning left because of impulsiveness only saddened me, but older people doing the same because of muddleheaded desire to keep up with fashion simply aroused in me full-force resentment. Looking around, I found no one shouldering responsibility for the Chinese people. The war led not to emergence of a new vitality to build a new nation, but only to the evils of the Communists, who were breaking the country apart. It was truly a great tragedy for China, and a huge loss for the world. I could not help but to blame the Chinese descendants of the Yellow Emperor for their unfaithfulness and betrayal.³⁴

Mou’s passion for Confucianism and against communism made him very observant of the post-war political condition. In January 1946, the KMT decided to resume its constituent meeting, which had been suspended due to the war. Several political parties, including the CCP, were invited to participate. However, due to the lack of mutual trust between the Republicans and the Communists, the latter withdrew from the meeting and prepared for civil war. Two prominent Confucian figures, Liang Shuming (梁漱溟, 1893-1988) and Zhang Dongsun (张东荪, 1886-1973), were also involved in party politics. Mou wrote a respectful letter to each of his former teachers, trying to remind them to set good examples for the youth and avoid indulging themselves in political contests. However, his effort was fruitless. Deeply disappointed, Mou decided to distance himself from these utopian teachers. Just one year later, the civil war began. Mou sadly witnessed the corrupted KMT swiftly losing control and retreating to the island of Taiwan. The coming of the new Communist regime seemed inevitable.³⁵ Unwilling to cooperate with this regime, Mou had to leave his family on the

³⁴ See Mou, *AF*, 166.

³⁵ In many occasions Mou regarded the rise of communism in modern China as a personal and national tragedy. His political trilogy can be read as an intellectual explanation as well as critique of this phenomenon. For the latest scholarly work on the same issue, one may refer to Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949* (London

mainland, moving to Taiwan in 1949. He later remarried a local woman and built a new family there.

The political failure of the Republic government, as well as the overwhelming defeatism among his compatriots, pushed him to find a new way for democratic revival. His famous political trilogy – *Authority and Governance* (*Zhengdao yu zhidao*, 《政道与治道》), *Moral Idealism* (*Daode lixiangzhuyi*, 《道德理想主义》) and *Philosophy of History* (*Lishi zhexue*, 《历史哲学》) – was written in exile with an unbearable feeling of commiseration. As the crystal of this exhaustive study, Mou in 1958 helped to publish the “Manifesto for A Reappraisal of Sinology and the Reconstruction of Chinese Culture,”³⁶ with Zhang Junmai, Tang Junyi, and Xu Fuguan (徐复观, 1903-82). All the authors regarded themselves as the scholars of new Confucianism and the students of Xiong Shili. This key document envisioned China and the West as equal contributors, “jointly shoulder[ing] that burden of humanity’s hardships, sufferings, foibles, and faults” so as to “create a new road for humanity.” In particular, to fulfil its responsibility, Chinese culture required a democratic transformation of its political system:

Apart from the aristocratic feudalism of the pre-Qin period (ended 222 B.C.E.), the sole form of government in China was monarchy, until 1911. In such a system the ultimate political powers lay in the ruler rather than the people, and because of this there arose many unsolved problems, such as the order of succession to the throne, the interim between two dynasties, and the status of the ministers. ...In order to break through this situation the only way is to establish a democratic government. ...It then follows that a constitution must be drawn up, in accordance with the popular will, to be the basis of the exercise by the people of their political rights. Only thus may the people all attain moral self-realization, since self-realization demands, politically, the freedom both to ascend to and to retire from official positions. ...The future development of Chinese politics cannot be precisely predicted, but it is certain that Marxist-Leninism will be discarded eventually and the spiritual life of the nation will press forward toward the establishment of a democratic government.³⁷

and New York: Routledge, 2015).

³⁶ The document was also translated “Declaration to the World on Behalf of Chinese Culture”, see de Bary and Lufrano, *Sources of Chinese Tradition, Volume II*, 550-555.

³⁷ Ibid., 554-555. As Serina Chan summarized, the Manifesto advocates “post-colonial cultural nationalist discourse for cultural parity between China and the West in the midst of continuing Euro-American cultural dominance....(And) the document served to move the authors’ Han Chinese cultural nationalist discourse into an imagined global arena for an ideological contest between Chinese and Western Cultures.” See Serina Chan, *The Thought of Mou Zongsan* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 278.

Like the other signers of the Manifesto, Mou devoted himself to preaching this Confucian message of democracy in Taiwan. But his teaching and writings were more and more offensive to the authorities, which led him to be expelled in 1960. Invited by his friend Tang Junyi, Mou reluctantly moved to Hong Kong for academic employment at the new-established Chinese University. In a Cantonese-speaking colony, he felt further isolated. As he had done during the war, this time, Mou managed to sublimate his frustration into new philosophical explorations. Over the next twenty-five years, he published nine major monographs, together with single translations of all three volumes of Kant's Critiques and a multitude of essays, lectures, and occasional writings. The general motive of this philosophical effort, as Mou himself indicated, was explicating the intellectual and spiritual roots of the democratic vision: "Before my fiftieth birthday and from the thirty-eighth year of the Republican period, I encountered dramatic political change and thus resolved to accomplish: first, *Moral Idealism*; second, *Authority and Governance*; and third, *Philosophy of History*. Since these three books intended to solve the problem of the outer kingdom (*waiwang*, 外王) based on the Chinese teachings of inner sainthood (*neisheng*, 内圣), the essence of such teachings must be fully revealed."³⁸

Mou officially retired in 1974 but continued to lecture in Hong Kong and Taiwan for another two decades. His later works made him a major figure of the second generation of new Confucianism and a celebrated thinker in comparative philosophy. *The Complete Works*, compiled by his students, consists of thirty-three volumes and more than twelve million words, covering three main schools of Chinese philosophy (Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism) and every major philosophical area from logic, epistemology, ontology and ethics, to the philosophy of history and political philosophy. As one of his analysts keenly observed, most of Mou's mature works were accomplished in "a time of loneliness, depression, and frustration, and a feeling of exile."³⁹ Since the lifetime of Confucius, this has been a classic experience in the cultivation of a saint spirit. Just like his admired great teacher, Mou in later life dedicated himself to his students but was consigned to a job of little prestige, with a sense of destiny. In 1995, he died in Taiwan at the age of 87.

As an advocate of Chinese philosophy and Confucianism in particular, Mou began to see his influence on the mainland and in Taiwan, Hon Kong, South Korea and North America in his late years. Since the 1980s, along with the resurgent interest in Chinese classics, his works have been widely read and debated by philosophers, sinologists, and historians from the East to

³⁸ Mou Zongsan, "Preface to the revised edition," *PH*, 16.

³⁹ Jason Clower, *Late Works of Mou Zongsan: Selected Essays on Chinese Philosophy* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 4.

the West. He was regarded by the author of *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* as the most original thinker among contemporary New Confucians.⁴⁰ In 1987, he was awarded the honourable Doctor of Letters by the University of Hong Kong, which confirmed his contributions in extending traditional Confucian moral philosophy to its modern form and developing a political philosophy of democracy from a Confucian starting point.⁴¹ Last, it might be worth noting that, unlike Barth, Mou to a great extent succeeded in building his school of thought. His students include Tu Weiming (杜维明), Liu Shu-hsien (刘述先), Cai Ren-hou (蔡仁厚), Lee Ming-huei (李明辉), Lin An-wu (林安梧) and many others teaching around the world. His vision of the prominent role of Confucianism in world philosophy is becoming a reality.

2.4 Comparative observations

This chapter provides an existential foundation for our comparative ethics at the next stage. Based on careful historical contextualization, we focus on the work and life of the two thinkers and their sustained ethical concerns for responsibility. Inspired by the general distinction of structure and agent in ethnographical studies, we can now draw certain remarkable parallels that illuminate our comparative analysis.

From the structural perspective, both Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan experienced the political turbulence of the World Wars on through the Cold War, with corresponding political crises in their beloved countries. Barth, as a Reformed professor and pastor, had an intellectual career that spanned the collapse of the *Belle Époque* (~1918), the Weimar period (1919-1933), the dominance of German Fascism (1933-1945), and the early stages of the Cold War (1946-1962). During this half-century, Barth witnessed not only a theological crisis in the German Protestant Church but also a cultural crisis in modern European civilization. Mou Zongsan, a professor of Chinese philosophy, suffered through similar radical political and cultural changes and perceived an overwhelming crisis in traditional Chinese civilization. He started his intellectual career in the period of the Republican government (1929-1933), endured a displaced life during the War against the Japanese (1937-1945) and the Civil War (1946-1949), and finally spent the rest of his life as an exile in Hong Kong and Taiwan (1949-1995). As contextual

⁴⁰ See Robert Audi, ed., *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 593.

⁴¹ The whole quotation wrote and delivered by Professor Francis Charles Timothy Moore is available at http://www4.hku.hk/honggrads/index.php/archive/graduate_detail/176.

thinkers, Barth and Mou were deeply involved in political struggles in their own ways and with various achievements. But what was common to them both was a constant concern for cultural and political issues, and a critical response to the predicament of the people as well as the prospect of human dignity in a time of crisis.

From the agential perspective, moral reflections for both Barth and Mou was not merely works carried out in an ivory tower; it involved substantial effort in integrating theory with praxis in real life. It is therefore not surprising that each played a leading role in defending orthodox tradition at all costs. By doing so, they *de facto* represented the height of moral conscience in the face of political and ideological hegemonies. As a Christian witness in the civil community, Barth courageously led the German Confessing Church and became the salient defender of dogmatic theology during the Nazi period. The Theological Declaration of Barmen was his most significant contribution to the ecumenical movements of the twentieth century. With more inclinations to cultural nationalism, Mou devoted his entire life to reviving the Confucian Orthodox tradition as the cultural foundation of state-building for modern China. It eventually led to the maturation of his philosophy, which offers the promise of mutual understanding between East and West.⁴² In practice, he was also very active in intellectual campaigns against the dictatorship of both the Republican government in Taiwan and the Communist regime on the mainland.

It is this practical nature of these two thinkers' theological or philosophical work, represented by their conceptions of responsibility, that deserves more in-depth interpretation. That is the task of our analysis in the subsequent chapters. For now, it is enough to say that this is exactly the moral obligations they inherited and refined from their distinct traditions. For Barth, the public witness in the political realm is the proper response to the very Word of God. For Mou, the practice of one's intellectual intuition requires a constant response to her innate knowledge. These convictions thus not only led them to set personal examples for responsible actions but also affirm certain forms of collective responsibility in political life. Based on these observations, we cannot accept that there is a discontinuity between their thoughts and deeds. Just the opposite: for these two thinkers, so-called theoretical work must be fundamentally practical. The critics listed above may have overlooked the fact that every important decision

⁴² For a useful summary of Mou's thought and his contributions to comparative philosophy, see Esher C. Su, "A Review of The Complete Works of Mou Zongsan," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (2004): 335-341.

needs to be an uneasy combination of discretion and resolution, which certainly applies in the exemplary cases of our subjects.⁴³

Moreover, when considering the possibility of mutual engagement between the two thinkers, we may add that their involvement in the politics of democratic socialism in Switzerland, Germany, and China is hardly a historical coincidence. Even though they were unknown to each other, Barth would agree with Mou that only democratic politics, with its constitutional and equalitarian emphases, is worth pursuing as the collective effort for a flourishing common life. Mou would assent with Barth that such a civil community cannot survive without robust ideas and actions of responsibility informed by religious or moral traditions. Based on these shared insights, both Barth and Mou would find it difficult to accept either a dubious separation between morality and politics, like the liberals, or the arbitrary convergence of the two, like the totalitarians. Rather, they would choose to stand between the two fallacious extremes and instead develop a constructive relationship between tradition and democracy. Most importantly, such a common endeavour enables us to read these two thinkers as overcoming their own superior and exclusive inclinations, moving away from presumably religious rivals, and turning to endorse more humble and dynamic exchange of their ethics of responsibility. Barth and Mou would realise that building discursive alliances and meanwhile keeping proper boundaries with religious others is not a compromise of faith or traditions but is instead a powerful attempt at people's liberation from political and ideological hegemonies. This is the strength of the careful comparison with constructive purposes that we seek to present here. Before we thoroughly examine this practical aspect of responsibility, however, we first turn our attention to the different sources of responsibility.

⁴³ Recent hermeneutical studies based on careful readings of Barth and Mou have challenged these evaluations and confirmed our observations in this chapter. With reference to Barth's moral theory, see John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); William Werpehowski, *Karl Barth and Christian Ethics: Living in Truth* (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2014). With reference to Mou's political theory, see Stephen Angle, *Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy: Toward Progressive Confucianism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

Chapter 3

Responsibility and the Ultimate Beings in Action

3.1 Introduction

To explain the first comparative aspect, this chapter focuses on the objective and subjective sources of responsibility for human beings in two moral accounts, namely, those of Karl Barth and of Mou Zongsan. As we have previewed in Chapter 1, the major bridge concept used for our interpretive task here is precisely this *source of responsibility*. The term *source* directs our attention to the origin, motive or archetype of an object. Using Aristotle's terminology, it is the formal and material causes of things. Hence, "the source of responsibility" denotes the fundamental forces that shape the will and action of responsibility within or beyond humanity. However, it seems less useful to suggest an umbrella concept of responsibility before we take account of its distinct usages by Barth and Mou, though we can still take some clues from the ordinary understanding of this term. In fact, one of the remarkable meanings of responsibility in modern English is "a moral obligation to behave correctly towards someone or something".¹ Such a usage implies a correspondence of one's will and actions with one's submission to a certain principle in certain contexts. In short, responsibility occurs in relationships.

In modern ethical inquiry, the significance of this preliminary understanding of responsibility is hard to exaggerate. As Paul Ricoeur reminds us, since the Enlightenment it has occupied the centre of moral philosophy. This is the legacy of Immanuel Kant.² The first giant of modern ethics, Kant developed the unique approach of seeking moral laws by means of practical reason while at the same time putting extraordinary stress on the autonomous will of human agents, i.e., rather than on external authority. However, Kant's ambitious project of metaphysics of morals remains incomplete, for it left some haunting tensions awaiting further elaboration and even correction. One of them was his expressed optimism about identifying moral laws by human reason (his own, first and foremost) over against his deep pessimism about humanity, which always tends to distort reason rather than following it. In the second part of *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant discerns this dilemma in the concept of "duty":

¹ See the *Oxford Dictionary*, available at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/responsibility>, accessed on 10 September 2017.

² Paul Ricoeur, "The Summoned Subject in the School of the Narratives of the Prophetic Vocation," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 271.

There have at all times been philosophers who have absolutely denied the reality of this disposition in human actions and ascribed everything to more or less refined self-love. They did not, on account of this, call into doubt the correctness of the concept of morality but rather spoke with deep regret of the frailty and impurity of human nature, which is indeed noble enough to take as its precept an idea so worthy of respect but at the same time is too weak to follow it, and uses reason, which should serve it for giving law, only to look after the interests of the inclinations, whether singly or, at most, in their greatest compatibility with one another.³

The above quote is noteworthy not only because of its profound insight into humanity but also because it offers a critical issue in the Kantian ethic which could clarify the fundamental similarity and dissimilarity between Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan. On the surface, it looks like a controversy between pessimistic and optimistic views of humanity. If Barth read Kant's statement, he would probably agree with the second half and reject the rest, while Mou would do the opposite. However, when we think deeper, another horizon of humanity (beyond the moral) emerges. We could say it is an *existential* condition: the reality of each human being a moral agent in a relationship. Both Barth and Mou, along with Kant, developed their moral theories of responsibility at this fundamental level, insisting that they be based on a realistic view of humanity as perfectly represented by one's encounter with the typical person(s). For Barth, it is only Jesus Christ; for Mou, it is Confucius and other saints. In this regard, both thinkers stand among those who strive to correct and surpass Kant and develop a more robust moral theory in accordance with their traditions. It is precisely in the process of undertaking these tasks, as we shall see later, that their formulations of responsibility gradually take shape.

The current chapter is our interpretive attempt to present these two intellectual endeavours centred on the source of responsibility. The first section reviews the conceptual scheme of responsibility in Kant's moral metaphysics. It is useful to treat Kant as a bridge figure between Barth and Mou, for the former provided basic vocabulary and themes for the two thinkers as they elaborated their distinct ethical systems. The second and third sections are devoted to a careful examination of the concept of "source of responsibility" in Barth and in Mou. We deal with this comparative study by paying attention to several conceptual parallels in their terminology, which point to their basic agreements and disagreements with Kant and meanwhile shed light on their own approaches to the source of responsibility. As we have mentioned briefly

³ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 19.

and will illustrate in more detail, both Barth and Mou raise their ethical inquiries primarily on the existential level of humanity. While the Kantian emphasis on respect for the law was congenial to Barth, the focus on general rules was not. Barth stresses the specificity of the Word of God to every human situation. Only when we see the Word of God in this way, Barth believes, can it become the proper source of a responsible self. Following the Confucian tradition, Mou agrees with Kant's strong emphasis on the agential responsibility in moral choice, but he insists that the freedom and its corresponding responsibility are not a mere postulate; rather, it is the dynamic representation of our fundamental moral character. Taking advantage of intellectual intuition, he argues, we can recognise the ultimate source of responsibility as a cosmologically creative force inherent in humanity. Finally, we summarise our comparative findings with a discussion of the ultimate beings in action as the source of responsibility shared by Barth and Mou, and the two directional orientations that separate them. These twin forms of responsibility, when tracing their very sources, can effectively overcome the weaknesses in Kantian ethics.

3.2 The Kantian project of responsibility

Though Immanuel Kant was the son of a Prussian Pietist family, his fame as the pioneering figure of modern philosophy came more from his time – the Age of Reason – than from his religious background. In his thought and work, Kant embraced the very spirit of the Enlightenment, which urged people to use the power of their reason to the utmost. For Kant and his contemporaries, putting faith in one's own reason was to put confidence in oneself (and not in authority) and was the only way to seek true freedom and be responsible. Not surprisingly, his philosophical career thus centred on unfolding the rational basis of science and morality, namely, the realm of nature and the realm of freedom. In a small essay titled "What is Enlightenment?" (1784), Kant provides a critical and decisive answer to the question:

The Enlightenment represents man's emergence from a self-inflicted state of minority. A minor is one who is incapable of making use of his understanding without guidance from someone else. This minority is self-inflicted whenever its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in a lack of the determination and courage to make use of it without the guidance of another. *Sapere Aude!* Have the courage to make use of your own understanding, is therefore the watchword of the Enlightenment.⁴

⁴ Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

The declaration leads contemporary Kant interpreter Gary Dorrien to comment that, the objective of Kant's famous critique of human reason was not to destroy it, but rather to fulfil it by clarifying its nature, capacity and limitation.⁵ In other words, such an intellectual endeavour was worthy for Kant, at all costs, because it responded effectively to the calling of his age and to scientific flourishing and, more importantly, because it represented the nobility of human beings in pursuing maturity. Only against this background can we grasp Kant's rational project of morality and his formulation of responsibility.

For Kant, seeking the supreme principles of freedom is the objective of moral metaphysics. This enterprise, he said, must expound the *a priori* principles of what ought to be, while other empirical inquiries such as psychology or anthropology should focus on the principles of what is. The useful instrument to achieve this goal is practical reason, the human capacity of knowing ideas. More importantly, following the non-contradiction principle, practical reason can release the power of the free will to prescribe laws.⁶ Without the assistance of reason, our will is subject to the decisions of others. In this situation, we simply lose control of our inner selves and thus are even worse than slaves. This was unacceptable to Kant.⁷ For him, being one's own master is the precondition of being a moral self. Using Kant's own terminology, it is autonomy, not any form of heteronomy, that qualifies the supreme principle of morality. In his *Groundwork*, Kant repeatedly stressed that true morality is meaningful only when it is correlated with an account of the moral agent in her free usage of practical reason according to her own will. Kant believed that autonomy and self-legislation are eventually the same, for it is this power of self-legislation that shows rational beings to be free, moral creatures. Otherwise, our talk of human morality would be self-deception. "What, then, can freedom of the will be other than autonomy, that is, the will's property of being a law to itself?"⁸ In this insistence, we see the core of Kantian moral theory.

⁵ Dorrien suggests that Kant's major themes should be read along this line: "*Critique of Pure Reason* modelled the new restrained, critical metaphysics of nature. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* expounded Kant's Enlightenment individualistic ethic of the categorical imperative, in which autonomous rational beings provided their own moral laws by universalizing situations of apparent norm conflict. *Critique of Practical Reason* expounded the *a priori* laws of conduct, conceiving the metaphysics of morals as the rational understanding of the moral law and its ramifications. *Religion Within the Boundaries of Reason* explained what kind of religion came from taking Enlightenment rationality and moral duty with utter seriousness." Gary Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit: The Idealistic Logic of Modern Theology* (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 48.

⁶ The fundamental source of morality is freedom, not a speculative worldview. As Dorrien explains of Kant's intellectual development, this is a lesson from Rousseau's *Discourses*. See Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit*, 36.

⁷ According to Kant's best biographer, Manfred Kuehn, the genesis of Kant's melding of true morality to autonomy was probably his repugnance at his Pietist education. Manfred Kuehn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 45-55.

⁸ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 52.

Once the unity of autonomy and morality is elaborated, there are two significant consequences for Kant's formulations of freedom and responsibility. First, since ethics must show that a person can legislate maxims for her actions, it has to assume freedom as the necessary condition for our being moral agents. Here freedom must be a postulate of practical reason to specify the conditions of morality. For this reason, Kant concedes that freedom does not belong to the sphere of *phenomena* but of *noumena*, a world of things-of-themselves that cannot be verified either by our reason or perception.⁹ Second, genuine responsibility, as the relational concept we have discussed, is endowed here with its more accurate meaning. To be sure, it depicts the reception of one's moral laws prescribed by her free will. Objectively it is her duty to maxims, and subjectively it is her respect to commands.¹⁰ In other words, "responsibility" is the chosen word that connects the proper response of the moral self to the moral laws enacted by the same subject. Concerning this unique character of responsibility, Christian ethicist William Schweiker suggests classifying Kantian moral theory as a strong and agential theory of responsibility.¹¹ Admittedly, Kant does not use the term responsibility in this ethical work. He chooses to use the terms duty (and obligation) instead. By stressing these terms, however, Kant *de facto* developed an account of responsibility. Furthermore, if autonomy is another expression of being responsible for self, it is proper for us to say that Kant has an ethics of responsibility. We must now examine this concept, as well as its source, in more detail.

The objective aspect of responsibility is duty. Kant insists that the sole source of certain obligations must be the moral laws, which have an absolute necessity and are not contingent on human nature or the environment. Moreover, for a moral law to be valuable, it must not base itself upon human purposes or the results of human conduct. If not, it will inevitably degrade into an instrument of human desire marked by the ingrained inclination to self-love. In Kant's view, this is the utilitarian misunderstanding of morality – its proponents tend to see good and evil as the mere products of human action and, thus, they fundamentally distort moral laws. To avoid this temptation, Kant formulates three important propositions of duty. First: an agent must promote her happiness not from inclination but from duty, and it is then that her conduct has moral worth. Second: an action from duty has its moral worth *not in the purpose* to be attained by it but *in the maxim* in accordance with which it is decided upon, and therefore the worth does

⁹ Ibid., 54-58.

¹⁰ According to Kant, a *maxim* is the subjective principle of volition; the objective principle (i.e., that which would also serve subjectively as the practical principle for all rational beings if reason had complete control over the faculty of desire) is the practical law. Meanwhile, a *command of morality* is a law which brings with it the concept of an unconditional and objective and hence universally valid necessity, and commands are laws that must be obeyed, that is, must be followed even against inclination. Ibid., 14, 27.

¹¹ William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 78.

not depend upon the realization of the object of the action but merely upon the *principle of volition* in accordance with which the action is done, without regard for any object of the faculty of desire. Third: therefore, duty is the necessity of an action from one's respect for the law.¹² In sum, Kant urges that to maintain the integrity of moral laws, one needs to explore the transcendent basis of the moral imperative, i.e., beyond human desires or experiences. This implies that moral laws, as the ground of obligation, can be sought only in a *a priori* concept of practical reason.¹³

Such an unconditional imperative of morality is categorical, simply “the form and the principle from which the action itself follows, and the essentially good in the action consists in the disposition.”¹⁴ The only categorical imperative which satisfies this criterion, as Kant claims, is that an agent must uphold the maxim of her action as a universal law, and by doing this, she must at the same time respect humanity in herself and others as members of a kingdom of ends.¹⁵ Kant believed that this statement successfully summarised the essence of any moral law. Only when a moral law fulfils this requirement, as (he said) “thou shalt not murder” or “love your neighbour as yourself” both do, can it finally become a principle worthy of following and therefore a legitimate source of obligation. Only when an individual applies it into *all* her maxims can her autonomous will and action avoid harming the wills and actions of others. In this way, human beings can ultimately live together in a community with every member as a free subject and object of legislation. Only in this ideal republic can responsibility for oneself

¹² Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 11-13.

¹³ Ibid., 3. Here we find the transcendental orientation of the Kantian concepts. See also Dorrien's comments on this issue. Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit*, 41.

¹⁴ As Kant defines: “Finally there is one imperative that, without being based upon and having as its condition any other purpose to be attained by certain conduct, commands this conduct immediately. This imperative is categorical. It has to do not with the matter of the action and what is to result from it, but with the form and the principle from which the action itself follows; and the essentially good in the action consists in the disposition, let the result be what it may. This imperative may be called the imperative of morality.” Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 27.

¹⁵ It is no exaggeration to say that this is the very heart of Kant's *Groundwork*. Kant believes that this universal imperative can be differentiated in three progressive forms and can be found in any form of moral maxims: “The above three ways of representing the principle of morality are at bottom only so many formulae of the very same law, and any one of them of itself unites the other two in it. There is nevertheless a difference among them, which is indeed subjectively rather than objectively practical, intended namely to bring an idea of reason closer to intuition (by a certain analogy) and thereby to feeling. All maxims have, namely, 1) a form, which consists in universality; and in this respect the formula of the moral imperative is expressed thus: that maxims must be chosen as if they were to hold as universal laws of nature; 2) a matter, namely an end, and in this respect the formula says that a rational being, as an end by its nature and hence as an end in itself, must in every maxim serve as the limiting condition of all merely relative and arbitrary ends; 3) a complete determination of all maxims by means of that formula, namely that all maxims from one's own lawgiving are to harmonize with a possible kingdom of ends as with a kingdom of nature. A progression takes place here, as through the categories of the unity of the form of the will (its universality), the plurality of the matter (of objects, i.e., of ends), and the allness or totality of the system of these.” Ibid., 41-44.

and others co-exist in harmony. To be sure, this idea was not Kant's invention – it is the classical meaning of freedom developed in ancient Greek city-states and enjoyed (to a certain extent) by their citizens. Kant acknowledged that he was inspired by his Enlightenment precursors, especially Jean-Jacques Rousseau.¹⁶ What Kant achieves here is shifting Rousseau's political vision to a moral one; we might also add that what Rousseau once admired on earth can now be expected only in heaven. In this metaphysical world, Kant teaches that the proper attitude towards the categorical imperative is nothing but respect.

It is thus appropriate to consider respect as the subjective aspect of responsibility. According to Kant, *respect* is the immediate determination of the will by virtue of the law and consciousness. The object of respect, properly understood, is simply the law.¹⁷ Kant explains, "Only what is connected with my will merely as ground and never as effect, what does not serve my inclination but outweighs it or at least excludes it altogether from calculations in making a choice – hence the mere law for itself – can be an object of respect and so a command."¹⁸ Respect in this regard can be seen as the effect of the law on the subject, rather than the cause of the law. This character of respect makes it an interlocking idea of duty. "An action from duty is," Kant continues, "to put aside entirely the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will, hence there is left for the will nothing that could determine it except objectively the *law* and subjectively *pure respect* for this practical law, and so the maxim of complying with such as law even if it infringes upon all my inclinations."¹⁹ Now the congenial nature of respect to duty is evident. For Kant, duty is nothing but the necessity of one's action from pure respect for the command. This is because, as an estimation of a worth that surpasses all other motives recommended by one's inclination, respect illuminates the subjective condition of a good will. Here Kant impressively emphasises the great value of respect in the formation of morality. What Kant seems to make less clear, however, is the source of respect in moral practice.²⁰

On the practicability of respect, and on the formation of moral self in general, Kant concedes that this is a matter of religion. According to him, religion is "knowledge of all our

¹⁶ In the first book of *The Social Contract*, Rousseau states that "obedience to a self-prescribed law is freedom." Chapter 8. Speaking of this important phrase, Christine Korsgaard judges: "Possibly it was this suggestion that provided Kant with the solution to a problem he had worked on nearly all his life—the problem of what freedom is." Christine M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 40.

¹⁷ As Kant puts, "The object of respect is therefore simply the *law*, and indeed the law that we impose upon *ourselves* and yet as necessary in itself." Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 14.

¹⁸ Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁹ Ibid. Italics in original.

²⁰ Ibid., 16.

duties as a divine command.”²¹ This definition applies to every rational form of religion, or in Kant’s own term, *religion within the boundaries of reason*. For instance, the rational form of Christian faith must remind people that the object of moral aspiration is a pure heart, and only this is pleasing in the eyes of God; nevertheless, most people are captive to their desires or inclinations and therefore are not as good as they ought to be. To fill this gap, Kant places God as an assistant to human aspirations. He explains, “Now it is our universal human duty to elevate ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection, i.e., to the prototype of moral disposition in its entire purity, and for this, the very idea, which is presented to us by reason for emulation, can give us force.”²² The “prototype” in Kant’s mind refers to the Christ figure, which he also called the “personified idea of the good principle.”²³ It is this Christian idea of a God-like human prototype that can lift people to perfection by means of descending into their life and offering a supreme moral example.²⁴ Following G. E. Lessing, Kant acknowledges that, for the sake of moral perfection it is better to see Christ as the exemplary idea of a human being who perfectly fulfilled his moral duties, spread goodness restlessly through his teaching, and even suffered for the good of the whole world, including his enemies.²⁵ It is not surprising to find here the kernel of modern liberal theology. For Kant and his students of religion, the coming kingdom of God is no different from the kingdom of ends. If there is a unique message of Jesus’s radical life and teaching, it awaits the making of a reality by each morally reflective person as her responsibility.²⁶

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 477. It is also useful to see Kant’s own conviction here: “Speaking of his belief in God and a future world, Kant says: “I am certain that nothing can shake this belief, since my moral principles would thereby themselves be overthrown, and I cannot disclaim them without becoming abhorrent in my own eyes.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 650.

²² Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 80. At this point, Kant rightly expresses a Christian conviction that except for conducting themselves morally, everything that human beings do to please God is simply a religious illusion: “The one and true religion contains nothing but laws, i.e., practical principles ... Apart from a good life-conduct, anything which the human being supposes that he can do to become well-pleasing to God is mere religious delusion and counterfeit service of God ... It is superstitious delusion to want to become well-pleasing to God through actions that any human being can do without even needing to be a good human being.” *Ibid.*, 170.

²³ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁴ For the Christian foundation of Kant’s religious reasoning, see John Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God’s Assistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²⁵ “This union with us may therefore be regarded as a state of abasement of the Son of God if we represent to ourselves this God-like human being, our prototype, in such a way that, though himself holy and hence not bound to submit to sufferings, he nonetheless takes these upon himself in the fullest measure for the sake of promoting the world’s greatest good.” Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, 80.

²⁶ For a religious reading of his conception of the realm of ends (which might equal the Kingdom of God), refer to Stephen Palmquist, “The Kingdom of God is at Hand! (Did Kant Really Say That?)” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1994): 426-427.

The legacy of the Kantian project of responsibility is controversial. On one hand, both Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan fundamentally assent to Kant's attempt at using practical reason to explore the source of good and evil. They accept the main features of the moral imperative, which must transcend human desires and thus must be unconditional. They both agree with Kant that the ultimate source of good and evil is also the sole subject of responsibility to which human beings must be accountable. It is thus safe to say that the idea of responsibility does link these three thinkers. On the other hand, where Kant hesitates is the same place where Barth and Mou decide to set out. Kant seems leery of providing an ontological illustration of this ultimate source, for he never believes that human reason can fulfil such a formidable task. While acknowledging this difficulty, both Barth and Mou think it can be overcome by a refined concept of practical reason in accordance with their distinct traditions. Barth calls it the practical reason of piety. Its primary function is to respond to the overwhelming reality revealed by God himself. In other words, the divine command, not laws legislated by human agents, must be the genuine source of responsibility. For Mou, the ultimate source of goodness is the creative principle, which is universal in the cosmos and is also immanent in humanity. By using the concept of intellectual intuition, he argues for the human capacity of internal transcendence and its significance for moral formation. This is a typically Confucian effort, confirming the agency of human beings and energising their ethical practice. Let us first consider Barth's account of this matter.

3.3 The divine Word of God as the source of responsibility

Nigel Biggar has recently reminded us that a productive way to apprehend the driving convictions of Karl Barth is to identify what he is thinking against. When perceived as a response, Barth's seemingly vague and abstract statements immediately acquire vital significance.²⁷ What Barth was inducted into his early years was the liberal Protestant heritage indebted to Kant. The Neo-Kantian theologian Albrecht Ritschl (1822-89) combined the social dimension of Kantian morality with the notion of Kingdom of God and produced a refined Christian ethics for his age. In his new moral vision, Jesus' moral teaching about the brotherhood of man rather than his religious teaching about the redemptive action of God was treated as the defining feature of Christianity. Moreover, in the hands of Ritschl's two disciples, Adolph von Harnack and Wilhelm Herrmann, the most valid element of Christianity was further

²⁷ Nigel Biggar, "Barth's Trinitarian Ethic," in John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 212.

shifted from the divine actions of a gracious God to the affirmation of human duty and community. As we saw in Chapter 2, it was not until the outbreak of World War I, when Barth was stunned by their ethical failure, that he began to contest their teaching, and more fundamentally, the Kantian ethics in their theology.

Methodologically, Barth's correction of Kantian ethics starts from his argument with Kant about the proper meaning and function of practical reason. He wants to reorient Kant's dangerous human-centred bias and continue Kant's unfinished exploration of the full horizon of pure reason. It might be worth noting that this, for Barth, is not a depreciation of Kant's philosophy. Just the opposite. Every time he mentions Kant, he treats him seriously and with respect. In his eyes, Kant far surpassed his contemporaries as the representative of his age:

Kant is Kant and his critique of reason has nothing at all to do with a weariness of civilisation or a weariness of the Enlightenment. Kant both has and demands an almost unconditional faith in reason. But the only kind of reason he considers worthy of his trust is the reason which has first of all come to be reasonable as regards itself. The meaning of his critique of reason consists in the attempt to bring this kind of reason into prominence.²⁸

As a practitioner of modern theology, Barth understands the ground-breaking impact of Kantian rationalism on human knowledge in general and theological disciplines in particular. That is, from Kant onwards, modern people have found a broad way of using their reason. Theology in this light is no longer able to formulate its tenets simply on a claimed superior foundation and without having acquired a valid method of reason.²⁹ This is the challenge Kant has posed for any serious theological endeavour after him. Barth regards himself an insider who must respond to it.

The first critique undertaken by Barth is centred on the presupposition of practical reason. On the one hand, Barth is willing to recognise and follow Kant's emphasis of command in ethics; on the other hand, he rejects Kant's uncritical usage of human reason as the starting point. Early in his dialectical period, Barth stresses in *Romans* that the sole ground of morality must be the will of God:

²⁸ Karl Barth, *PT*, 271.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 273.

Morality is truly grounded only upon the pure will of God; it can never rest upon the immanent justification of our vitality, even should our power of will have reached its highest development. When, therefore, the will of God is displayed, it must manifest itself in radical criticism of what we possess and do and shall do, both individually and socially. It can never be manifested as sanctioning and justifying us, or even as a thing which contradicts and opposes us: “The idea of freedom lies beyond our investigation, for it bars the way to every positive representation” (Kant).³⁰

Moreover, in Barth’s later judgement, Kant’s stress on human agency in moral formation is distracting, for he mistakenly places free will and the formation of the categorical imperative on the shoulders of human beings. It could be thus inferred that Kant might suppose human being, as the agents of reason, to be the measure of all things. From a Christian perspective, this is nothing different from the sin committed by the first human and therefore must be ranked as a fatal temptation to transgress the boundaries given by God to his creatures. The tricky thing about its modern form, Barth discerns, is that the transgression finds a more abstract and universal mask. In other words, Kant’s pure concept of reason is not so pure; it is polluted.

Since it is reason itself which has alone been able to perform the critique of reason and has thus supplied those results of the critique of reason which have now become criteria, it is already taken for granted by the very starting-point of this philosophy of religion, and by the conception of the problem it is supposed to involve, that it is the agent of reason, man, that is, who, just as he is the measure of all things, is here thought of and provided for as the measure of religion, too: of its practical and theological possibilities, and also, and in particular, as God’s measure.³¹

By exposing Kant’s implicit message here, Barth identifies a clear moral judgement associated with Christian faith and thus avoids confusion with the rational form of human reason advocated by Kant.

To save the idea of practical reason from a misleading destination, Barth strives to rediscover its character of concreteness, dismissed in Kantian philosophy. This involves a substantial amount of conceptual reconfiguration. Barth explains that pure reason as the very capacity for knowing ideas concretely is itself practical reason, implying that true knowledge

³⁰ Ibid., 294.

³¹ Ibid., 304.

by pure reason is knowledge by practical reason. Meanwhile, true knowledge by practical reason, as it is accomplished in the deed performed according to one's duty, is also knowledge by pure reason.³² When this refined conception of pure reason is applied to the understanding of religion, its role shifts from formulating theoretical propositions (or postulates) to distinguishing empirical reality positively and concretely. For this reason, unlike Kant, who poses the existence of God, freedom and immortality as three foundational postulates in his ethics, Barth insists that a genuine knowledge of these must be perceived as concrete reality if they are intelligible by practical reason.³³ Now one can say that the epistemological significance of responsible practice has replaced abstract contemplation as the reliable way to truth. For Barth, this decisive move from philosophical idealism to theological realism is particularly valuable for a faithful Christian ethics, which must confirm that the grace of God as the overwhelming reality precedes all kinds of moral reflection and practice of human agents. Unfortunately, Kant only leaves a marginal role to the same grace because he worries that any claim of divine interference might potentially undermine the autonomy of moral agents.³⁴ To correct this misunderstanding, Barth stresses that a distinct theological interpretation of practical reason is indispensable:

It must be borne in mind that "reason alone" must in no circumstances be confused with "pure" reason, the capacity for the knowledge of ideas, but stands in contrast to the reason illuminated by revelation, the reason which believes positively and concretely. Kant's understanding in the philosophy of religion is not concerned with this last kind of reason as such and in itself. The contemplation of revelation, or alternatively of the reason which believes positively and concretely as such and in itself, has for the philosopher the significance of contemplating the border beyond which he feels, declares and conducts himself as one not competent, as a spectator, as a member of another faculty which is not qualified to judge of the matter, giving way respectfully and a little maliciously to the theologian, not contesting what he says, but not expressing agreement either, interested, but disclaiming all responsibility waiting

³² Ibid., 276.

³³ As Barth stresses, "God, freedom and immortality – these ideas which in their regulative use are indispensable also in empirical knowledge – cannot be perceived *in abstracto*, i.e., by contemplation in isolation, but they can be perceived *in concreto*, i.e., in actual fact. It is in and with the fact that their true contemplation is accomplished; it is in practice that the true thing is accomplished, the theory which accompanies, provides the basis for and contains within itself all empirical knowledge but which now also rises truly and legitimately above it. They have no truth in a theory by itself." Ibid.

³⁴ See Kant's response to Jung-Stilling where his quotes include Parerga.

to see whether the other, the theologian, will find the desire and the courage to take up the position which is his due as the proclaimer of revelation, of religion, that is, within and without the limits of reason alone.³⁵

This new configuration of practical reason allows Barth, as a proclaimer of revelation, to perceive the divine command actively and concretely. Now Barth has arrived at a new frontier. To capture the character of the divine command, he deliberately suggests a set of analogies which conceive the Command as the *Claim*, the *Decision* and the *Judgement* of God.³⁶ These interlocking concepts as a whole are used to illuminate the ethical significance of the divine command for human beings, and each of them represents a way of interpreting the same divine command as the source of responsibility. First of all, as the Claim, the divine command is the witness of God's will which requires our obedience in will and in action. But what is the source of His power over us? Moreover, why must we obey him? Barth answers that the validity of God's claim lies in His gracious will. By virtue of this will God has taken the initiative from all eternity and makes Himself responsible for our relationship with Him. In other words, God is not only mighty over us or simply the essential good. He is not even only our complete satisfaction. Much more than that. The reality is that He has made Himself to us. By so doing, He has taken our place and taken up our cause. This is the very basis and authority of the command of God.³⁷ Therefore, God's claim has power over us and is superior to all other claims, demanding our sincere admission that what He does is right, and requiring our free obedience to this demand.³⁸ Different from Kant, Barth reminds us that God has graciously turned to us not in an abstract manner, but decisively through Jesus Christ, the incarnated God among us.

Barth stresses that one cannot speak of the divine claim without mentioning Jesus Christ, and neither can we dismiss Jesus Christ at the margins. On the contrary, Jesus Christ is the key, for He actualises the command of God as its form and content. As the substance of the divine claim, Jesus Christ Himself is the Gospel. He Himself is "the resolve and the execution of the essential will in which God willed to give Himself to us."³⁹ He is the only way in which God shows his grace to us. God's fundamentally good will, as the imperative requiring our obedience, is nothing more and nothing less than Jesus Christ. In him the divine Word became flesh. This

³⁵ Ibid., 280-281.

³⁶ For a theological interpretation of Barth's usage of analogy, see Hans Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edwards Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 114-167.

³⁷ Karl Barth, *CD II.2*, 552-565.

³⁸ Ibid., 552.

³⁹ Ibid., 557.

implies that He has taken up the responsibility to unite with us. God became one of us, assuming our sinful humanity into his deity. Only in this way can we as human beings realise that our existence, although darkened and destroyed by our sin and under the sentence of death, has unexpectedly opened to heaven, purified and sustained from above. We are therefore not rejected by God but receive His unity in the love that penetrates all things and is particularly confirmed by Jesus Christ to us. In this respect, Barth finds no reason to reject a statement to which Kant might have assented: “Jesus is the basis on which we may believe in God, the Word in which dwell the light and force to move us to this event.”⁴⁰ Moreover, Barth cautions that such a statement is not a mere vision or moral ideal, but the unconditional and universal truth of our human condition. Irrespective of our positive or negative responses, this gracious reality of divine claim has come true in the actual presence of Jesus Christ.

Barth likewise upholds Jesus Christ as the form of the gracious claim. By its very nature, this claim is a permission which grants us a certain freedom. According to Barth, this is the remarkable feature of the divine command in contrast to all other commands, for the latter always restrict the freedom of human beings and appeal to our distrust and fear.⁴¹ However, the real command of God is different: He gave Himself for us so that we might live with Him in peace and joy. More importantly, the command of God does not confront us as an ideal, but as a reality fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. It is in His relationship with us, and our relationship with Him, that God’s eternal and gracious will has been directed to us and thus has made us new. It is only in this person that our freedom is accomplished. Admittedly, the command of God shares a form with other commands when it asks “do this and do not do that”. However, Barth reminds that this is only a superficial similarity. When we consider the formation of a new moral agent with a new *telos*, the distinct nature of the divine command becomes evident. As he impressively puts it:

Do this, because in so doing you may and will again live of and by My grace. Do this, because in so doing you may make it true that your rejection has been rejected in the death of Jesus on the cross, that for His sake your sin has been forgiven. Do this, because in Jesus Christ you have been born anew in the image of God. Do it in the freedom to which you have been chosen and called, because in this freedom you may do this, and can do only this. For this, and not for any other reason, do it.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid., 557.

⁴¹ Ibid., 585.

⁴² Ibid., 587.

In short, in Jesus Christ God sets us free by granting us a new identity.⁴³

The command of God is not merely a divine claim, as we have seen – it is also the divine decision made by God in Jesus Christ. Barth suggests that this second aspect of His command may help us comprehend a greater fact of our existence as well as its relationship to Him. One basic reality of human existence, Barth notes, is that our life consists of a continuous series of decisions in our willing and action, which to a large extent decides the direction of our way both as a whole and in detail. It thus can be said that human being as God's creatures exists through these decisions; and, more importantly, it is in these decisions that we give our witness to the divine action of God.⁴⁴ The sovereignty of God must respond to this more concrete reality. In other words, the claim of God has to address this fact by extending its venture that it can and must measure our decisions both as a whole and in every moment of our life. This explains why the divine claim of God can be read as His divine decision. It is this prior decision of God, expressed in His command, that sets the criterion – good or evil – for our conduct.⁴⁵ Our own choice, whether good or evil, obedient or disobedient, is by its nature subject to this relational fact indicated by the conception of the divine decision. For Barth, when such a penetrating reality is recognised, we can make two immediate inferences. On one hand, God has set up the measurement for us, from all eternity and at the heart of time, in the person of Jesus Christ. Beyond Him, we find no object to which we can be accountable. On the other hand, whether we are righteous in His sight is a conclusion made not by ourselves but by Him, according to His primal decision made and expressed in His will from eternity and His act in every moment of our lives.⁴⁶

⁴³ Barth provides very detailed illustrations to show that both the Law revealed in the Old Testament and the Gospel in the New Testament convey this same message. *Ibid.*, 572-575.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 632.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 634.

⁴⁶ According to early Barth in his *The Epistle to the Romans*, the differentiation between good and evil is first and foremost an ontological one: "Sin and grace, then cannot be placed side by side, or arranged in series, or treated as of like importance, any more than death and life can be so treated. There is no bridge across the gulf which separates them. They have no blurred edges which might be run together. The impassable gulf runs starkly through the fissure between good and evil, between what is valuable and what is valueless, between what is holy and what is unholy. Those who inhabit in the dim world of men and are not under grace cannot perceive the gulf which provides them with this clear criterion and enables them to survey the new order. Those, however, who do possess this criterion are again and again compelled to draw up a list of sinners and righteous men and to make a catalogue of what is permitted and what is forbidden. They are bound to attempt a system of ethics. But, when this is said, it must be borne in mind that the criterion by which they are compelled to undertake this systematization also renders it no more than an attempt. The knowledge of God which is the condition of our survey compels us to distinguish clearly between sinners and righteous men; but the human knowledge which emerges is at once dissolved by the very criterion by which it was created. Only because of the power of obedience in which we stand are we able to comprehend and lay hold of the possibility of impossibility. And this power is the power of the Resurrection." Karl Barth, *RII*, 228.

Barth suggests that the idea of responsibility usefully captures the above fundamental reality of the human condition. Specifically, we live in a dialogical relationship with God and we are summoned by His prior decision to become His covenant-partner. No matter who we are or what we do, this is the universal, objective, concrete reality of our being. As the object of God's divine claim in Jesus Christ, we meanwhile live under His transcendent will concerning our moral existence, for only Jesus Christ can and will measure our whole moral being and every moral decision according to our normative role as His covenant-partner. Therefore, when perceived as human's answerability in the covenantal relationship with God, responsibility unfolds its decisive source in Jesus Christ. Barth conceives this as the heart of the message when he talks about the sovereignty of the divine decision of God and the corresponding idea of responsibility of human being:

We live in responsibility, which means that our being and willing, what we do and what do not do, is a continuous answer to the Word of God spoken to us as a command. It takes place always in a relationship to the norm which confronts and transcends us in the divine command. It is continually subject to an enquiry concerning its correspondence with this norm. It is always an answer to this enquiry. Man does not belong to himself. He does not exist in a vacuum. He is not given over to the caprice of an alien power, nor to his own self-will. He may or may not know and will it, but because Jesus Christ as very God and very man is the beginning of all the ways and works of God, man is inseparably linked with God and confronted by Him. He is subjected to the divine will, Word and command, and called to realise the true purpose of his existence as a covenant-partner with God. As a man, he is objectively tested by this determination and objectively questioned as to its fulfilment. This is the essence of his responsibility.⁴⁷

But Barth does not stop here. He further reminds that the idea of responsibility reveals two interlocking realities of our moral existence. First and foremost, it involves a fundamental responsible relationship between God and us, bonded by the gracious covenant (as well as its norms) initiated by Him. It thus illuminates a basic reality of the human condition, that is, we always confront God and bear an ineluctable obligation to Him. The fundamental reality of our existence as moral beings is that we, by our being and willing, constantly give God an answer.

⁴⁷ Barth, *CD* II.2, 641.

No matter how conscious we are of the divine will, each of our decisions is questioned by God. No matter whether we choose to obey the command of God, our every action renders an account to Him.⁴⁸ This is an objective description of human being as God's predestined partners. Not only Christians but also people of other religions and worldviews fall into this same category, without exception. This universality of the human responsible state derives from its transcendent source: Jesus Christ, a fact which can be properly deduced from the sovereignty of the divine decision.

Besides that, the idea of responsibility also involves our practice of moral reflection when we attempt to examine our wills and deeds. According to Barth, this is the secondary reality of our responsible being:

The idea of responsibility shows us what is meant by moral reflection, the examination of what we are and will and do and do not do, of the mutual relationship between the command of God and our existence. It consists in our attitude to the fact that we are responsible and are objectively involved in responsibility. It also presupposes that we know this and have therefore been shown our true situation. But we can be shown this only as we hear and apprehend in faith the message of the divine covenant of grace. It is the Christian who really knows man's responsibility, and the frightening fact that he is objectively and continuously involved in responsibility, in the rendering of an account to the sovereign decision of God.⁴⁹

For any kind of moral reflection to be able to show our true situation and become our guidance in responsibility, it must proceed by hearing and apprehending in faith the message of the divine command of grace. Here Barth is neither claiming a privileged Christian wisdom nor proposing an exclusive Christian way of moral formation. For him, such a wisdom or method does not belong only to Christians. If Christians have become the first group among people to recognise the responsibility of human beings as a universal reality, it is simply because they recognise the very source of responsibility, the gracious God in Jesus Christ, and, correspondingly, their actual state of irresponsibility.⁵⁰ Due to the sinful condition of humanity, we by ourselves cannot be responsible selves. We cannot fulfil our responsibility before God. We can never keep the covenant as faithfully as God does. In this way, our encounter with God is not at all a

⁴⁸ Ibid., 642.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 643.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 644-645.

parallelism between the divine and human will; it is a contradiction. Neither the good will nor the good deeds of Christians can change this fact. The only thing to do is ask for gracious help from the responsible covenant Partner. In fact, Barth does address – and quite seriously, at that – this crucial issue of human responsibility, which we will examine more carefully in Chapter 4. Here it is sufficient to say that the latter is the essence of moral reflection.

The purpose of moral reflection is never to transcend oneself, but to hear and answer faithfully the command of God. This is because the command of God is not merely a claim and a decision, it is also a divine judgment. For Barth, the summons to appear before the judgment seat of God means, first and foremost, that our existence is measured, assessed and weighed by God. This must be recognised as the last aspect of the basic reality of our existence. Again, this ultimate fact of our destination presupposes a responsible relationship with God as our omnipotent, competent and gracious Lord. As Barth explains,

To hear the command of God means then, first and decisively, to hear that God is our God, and that we are His Israel, His Church. For the positive factor first and decisively stated by the command is that the man on whom judgment is passed is God's – a member of His family, of His people, of His kingdom – and therefore whatever this may involve, that he must be assessed and distinguished and loved as one who is subject to God's command, and judged by it.⁵¹

Corresponding to the fact that we are God's possessions is that we are meanwhile offenders of His claim and decision. We are thus subject to His condemnation and punishment. In other words, it is the concept of divine judgement that gives us a sense of responsibility to remember him in all our willing and doing, and that prepares us to accept ourselves as its transgressors. The compelling proof of this double-edged reality is also the source of our responsibility, that is, the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

The resurrection alone is decisive for the truth that, as sinners before God, we are pronounced for righteous. It silences both the contradiction and the misunderstanding of this proposition. In it, the confrontation of man with God has run its course and reached its end. This end is that the sinful man who was condemned and punished by God on account of his sin is acquitted and justified by the same God, being invested

⁵¹ Ibid., 735.

with all the glory of one who is righteous, and therefore rescued from the death into which he had fallen.⁵²

Jesus Christ is the basis of divine judgment and He carries it out through His death and resurrection. He Himself thus defines the purpose of the judgment of God: He judges us in order to make us free for everlasting life under His lordship.⁵³ Barth describes this amazing fact through a sharp distinction between condemnation and forgiveness:

We are totally evil when we enter His judgment and totally cleansed when we leave it. In the one sentence of God we are both *semper peccatores* and *semper iusti*. The forgiveness of sins consists in the fact that these two predicates do not exclude one another, that they stand opposed, not in dialectical equilibrium, but with a preponderance of the second over the first; in the fact that their sequence is irreversible, that God never creates evil out of good, but good out of evil; in the fact that *semper iusti* is the second and final word which is to be heard and considered at this point. This is God's grace in judgment.⁵⁴

As a result, the divine judgment itself becomes a call for faith. And our faith becomes an answer to the divine call.⁵⁵ For faith is our practical acknowledgement that right is done to us by God. It is our acceptance of the rightness of this right of God.⁵⁶ Therefore, as the outcome realised in the divine judgment, faith leads us to a new birth of our life so that we can and will follow the command of God and do what is good in His eyes. In a parallel and profound way, Barth unfolds the connection of this term to the new horizon of moral formation:

To believe is to turn from every opinion and conviction which we may have in our own strength about good and evil to the truth in which we stand before God according to the divine verdict. To believe is to turn from the obedience of our own works in the

⁵² Ibid., 758.

⁵³ Ibid., 733.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 757.

⁵⁵ Faith never understands itself as an enterprise undertaken in man's own caprice or capacity or competence. It never understands itself as an original or meritorious achievement of man. It is an answer to the divine call and can only try to reflect and correspond to the fact that we are directed to live by the grace of God. It is the acknowledgement and attestation of the basis of right which is created by the mercy of God and to which every achievement can only be an achievement of thankfulness. Ibid., 767.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 766.

cleverness and power with which we might invest our being and action, to the obedience in which the same works can be done under the lordship of God. To believe is to turn from the sloth which allows the sinfulness of our own works to remain as though it were an eternal necessity, to the joy and readiness which derive from the knowledge that God's good will alone has eternal necessity, and therefore wills to be honoured in our work, too. To believe is to turn to the place which belongs to those who know mercy. Thus faith is the birth and life of the new man who can and will do what is good and well-pleasing to God. For faith is the apprehension and affirmation of the divine justification. It is the truthfulness in which we accept this as something that has really taken place. If we do accept it, the new man is born who as such can only do good works, to whom the desire and love for the will of God are fitting and natural, who as he breathes and eats and drinks and sleeps will definitely do what God approves and this alone, both in the secret recesses of the heart and in every relationship to his neighbour both in Church and state, at every stage and in every situation of life. This new man and his work are the purpose of the divine judgment. We must know that with every step we take into each new time, if we come from the divine judgment, we stand under this purpose; and that it is always fulfilled and realised already. To believe – to believe in true repentance – is to affirm in practice that God's purpose is fulfilled and realised already as we are those who are judged by Him. The morning has already come. We have only to live as we ought to live in this new day.⁵⁷

Through faith, a genuine responsibility finally becomes our reality. Through faith, we are made responsible and can joyfully prepare for an eternal life ordained and promised in His divine judgment. When we do this, we know that we are not responsible by the strength of our moral nature but are simply transformed by the gracious judgment of God in Jesus Christ. Our identity as a moral agent has been established. As Barth concludes, "We are made responsible as we have heard the voice of the risen Lord, and it is our responsibility to continue to hear this voice. It is as hearers of this voice that we are taken seriously in God's judgment, and it is as such that we must take ourselves seriously. As there is no other true responsibility, there is no other true seriousness."⁵⁸ In brief, once the source of responsibility is clear, the status of the responsible self has been justified and the way of moral formation starts to unfold.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 772.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 761.

Thus, for Barth, responsibility as an existential term captures a fundamental responsible relationship between God and human beings bonded by the gracious covenant (as well as its norms) initiated by God Himself. Its source is located firmly in the transcendent and concrete act of Jesus Christ. He Himself made us responsible by setting up our duty and purpose of life. In this light, He is the object we must hear and answer, and the One to whom we hold ourselves accountable. When we hear and answer, we must deal with it in faith. Faith as our responsible action towards Him involves our moral reflection on whether our own will and action fulfils His expectation. Putting these features together, we realise Barth's distinctive formation of responsibility in his theological ethics. Compared with the Kantian conceptual formula of imperative, Barth insists that only the divine command promised and executed in Jesus Christ is qualified to be such one. By its nature, it is not an abstract principle achieved by using our practical reason. It is a decisive fact beyond and prior to any effort at moral formation. It opens a new horizon for us and makes our faithful response desirable and practical. According to Barth, this is nothing but the stunning reality of free will discovered by human beings in the grace of God:

Established by God, men are freed from sin and, consequently, from death which is the consequence of sin. Immortal, they discover the free purpose of life; and free of purpose, they discover freedom of will. For those who have discovered this freedom, whether they employ it victoriously or no, all corruption becomes a parable of incorruption. Free of will, man has discovered himself. He is regal. His nobility is immeasurable and to his worth there is no limit; for he possesses the life which is eternal and true.⁵⁹

Based on these convictions, Barth on one hand accepts that Kant in his ethics of responsibility eventually expresses the essential Christian concern that what is obligatory should be superior to the concerns of what is pleasing and useful and valuable.⁶⁰ In this respect, his conception of responsibility is Kantian. On the other hand, he contends against Kant that, to affirm the unconditional nature of the imperative, we must not bound it as a self-willed object and treat it as remaining in the sphere of deliberation. For Barth, one truth of the human condition is that we as humans lack the teleological power to direct our own way of life, nor are

⁵⁹ Barth, *RII*, 180.

⁶⁰ Barth, *CD II.2*, 650.

we capable of differentiating good and evil by ourselves. Only Jesus Christ as our Lord has such power. But a more important truth is that He has decided to share this power with us freely, and He has accomplished this work in His own death and resurrection. Since Kant seems unwilling to put the atonement at the centre of his ethical teachings, his formulation of an unconditionally and universally valid imperative based on our rational nature is doomed to be unrealistic. It is worth noting that in a recent work Nigel Biggar makes just this acute observation in comparing the two thinkers. As he identifies:

We are accountable to a transcendent moral authority; and insofar as our sinful wills are not entirely consonant with that authority, we experience its claims as alien and coercive – that is, as imperatives. However, it is distinctly unKantian in that we do not discover what is right simply by means of a process of autonomous reasoning; that is, by deducing from the universal moral law of reason what is required in particular situations. Rather, we discover it in a unique event of encounter with the living God and his special command to us here and now.⁶¹

What we can add to the above comments is that, in the process of criticising Kant, Barth eventually developed a dialogical account of responsibility, with its source in divine command. Nevertheless, this also poses a weighty challenge to all other moral principles, because Barth claims that only an ethics based on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ has an exclusive claim to understand the full significance of the term of responsibility.⁶² Is this a valid and universal judgment concerning other moral traditions, such as Confucianism? To answer this question, we now turn to the New Confucian ethics of responsibility sought by Mou Zongsan.

3.4 The innate knowledge of good as the source of responsibility

In middle age, Mou Zongsan begins to stress the significance of Kant to his mission to modernise Confucianism.⁶³ He praises Kant as a philosophical Copernicus for what he accomplished in accordance with the spirit of the Enlightenment. This leads Mou both to treat Kant as the central figure of modern western philosophy and to dedicate himself to a dialogue between Confucianism and Kantian moral metaphysics over the next four decades. In Mou's

⁶¹ Biggar, "Barth's Trinitarian Ethic," 214.

⁶² Ibid., 727.

⁶³ Refer to Mou Zongsan, *AF*.

eyes, Kant upholds the great tradition of rationalism in his thought and work when he examines the capacity and limits of human reason. Such a philosophical stance marks Kant as the principal advocate of the Enlightenment. But Kant's real achievement lies in his relocation of the foundation of epistemological argument from the objective to subjective world, that is, with human beings as the agent. By doing so, he profoundly unfolds the possible rational capacities of human agency as the intelligent subject, the moral subject and the aesthetic subject. On all these new frontiers, Kant explored much further than any of his predecessors. For Mou, Kant launched a philosophical revolution with far-reaching impacts from which Mou himself deeply benefited. Connecting Kant to the Confucian tradition thus becomes crucial for his own philosophical aspirations. By engaging Kant, Mou expects, the moral tradition of Confucianism can be modernised; more importantly, by criticising Kant, the shining spirit of the Confucian tradition, far beyond Kant's moral horizon, can be accentuated. As Mou writes, the remarkable character of Confucianism is its stress on practical responsibility, which is the key difference between saints and philosophers:

These philosophers like Kant and Hegel are just philosophers. Their ideas can have positive implications for human history, culture and practice, but only speculative and philosophical. They are not so practical like Confucius, Mencius and the neo-Confucians who take the well-being of the whole world as their personal and positive responsibility, and treat academic knowledge as the guiding principle for individual and socio-political practices. For this reason, they are mere philosophers, while those characters are known as the saints.⁶⁴

In the moral tradition of Confucianism and especially in the teachings of late-Ming neo-Confucian Wang Yangming (王阳明, 1472-1529), Mou believes, there is always an earnest call for the integration of principle and practice. This is the requirement when we attempt to fulfil our responsibility in accordance with the legacy of sainthood. Specifically, for a principle to be responsible, it must not only be coherent in theoretical speculation; it must also be proven qualified to motivate, direct and regulate human action. Conversely, for a practice to be responsible, it must prove that it takes place under the guidance of certain principles, rather than arbitrary wills.⁶⁵ Only when principle and practice meet these criteria are they recognised by

⁶⁴ Mou Zongsan, *MI*, 28. All translations are done by the author unless otherwise noted.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

Confucians as meaningful and constructive. In other words, the seeming separation of principle and practice exists only for the sake of analytical convenience; in the world of real life, however, they must be united. This requires that a human agent must learn to actualise moral principles or disciplined moral practices in all kinds of living circumstances, from ordinary family and community life to state governance, and finally the well-being of the whole world. All of these must be treated by Confucians as the playgrounds of their responsible practice.⁶⁶ For Mou, this insistence on holistic application makes Confucianism stand out from other ethical accounts, like that of Kant, for it makes Confucianism normatively robust and practically feasible in the cultivation authentic moral agents. Mou himself forges this distinct feature of Confucianism in his new concept of *intellectual intuition*. He seems to have found a way to present the practical reason of Confucianism, possibly surpassing Kantian ethics. But Mou is quite clear that the crucial issue remains: how to elaborate the moral core of Confucianism and how to demonstrate that this very core was compatible with modernity? To answer these questions, he still had much more work to do in his philosophical project. As Stephan Schmidt understands, this task led Mou to reinterpret the moral teachings of Confucianism in terms of practical reason and autonomy, and ultimately to develop a modern version of Confucianism.⁶⁷

The concept of intellectual intuition signifies an innovative Confucian approach to practical reason, which can be further examined positively and passively. As a kind of intuition, intellectual intuition itself is a principle of cognitive presentation. Its goal is the passive concretion of moral principles. Meanwhile, intellectual intuition can also be seen as a positive principle of ontological actualisation.⁶⁸ Here one can notice that while Kant reserves intellectual intuition exclusively for God, Mou rejects Kant's view and believes that human beings can also possess this divine and infinite consciousness. In other words, intellectual intuition can comprehend the noumenal sphere, the things in themselves. In his *Phenomena and the Things in Themselves* (*Xianxiang yu wuzhishen*, 《现象与物自身》), Mou develops his famous doctrine of two-level ontology: "If we start from the assumption that 'man is finite as well as infinite,' we must apply ontology on two levels. The first is the ontology of the noumenal sphere, or the 'detached ontology (*wuzhi de cunyoulun*, 无执的存有论)." The second is the ontology

⁶⁶ Ibid., 51-52.

⁶⁷ Stephan Schmidt, "Mou Zongsan, Hegel, and Kant: The Quest for Confucian Modernity," *Philosophy East and West* 61, no. 2 (2011): 260-302; Chan Wing-Cheuk, "Mou Zongsan's Transformation of Kant's Philosophy," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33, no. 1 (2006): 125-139; Guo Qiyong, "Mou Zongsan's View of Interpreting Confucianism by 'Moral Autonomy'," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 2, no. 3 (2007): 345-362.

⁶⁸ Mou Zongsan, II, 184. For a critical examination of intellectual intuition from a comparative perspective, see Nicholas Bunnin, "God's Knowledge and Ours: Kant and Mou Zongsan on Intellectual Intuition," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35, no. 4 (2008): 613-624.

of the sphere of appearances, or the ‘attached ontology (*youzhi de cunyoulun*, 有执的存有论).’⁶⁹ It is worth noting that, while using the Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena, Mou defines metaphysical spheres of detachment and attachment in a way that is deeply indebted to the Huayan School of Chinese Buddhism (华严宗). Furthermore, when insisting on the infinite cognitive capacity of intellectual intuition, he practically echoes the Huayan Buddhist account of the “Two-Gates-in-One-Mind (*yixin kai ermen*, 一心开二门).” The difference, however, lies in the fact that for the former the true nature of reality is empty, while for Mou it is rather moral substance which is reflected by moral consciousness: “this clear consciousness is a moral substance, and as the same time an ontological substance.”⁷⁰

For a Confucian philosopher, Mou teaches, the essential task is to investigate the dynamism of intellectual intuition in regard to its epistemological, ontological and practical implications. First of all, intellectual intuition always corresponds to a saintly character who actualises moral principles. When the neo-Confucians in the Song and Ming dynasties attempted to portray an ideal-type Confucian character, they always found an innate knowledge of good (*liangzhi*, 良知) reflected in the life practice of Confucius and the other ancient saints. Mou uses a vivid metaphor “cutting off the crowd (*jieduan zhongliu*, 截断众流)” to highlight the purity and sobriety of intellectual intuition in its epistemological respect. Moreover, when we are truly encountered with sainthood, our intellectual intuition instantly acquires a supreme sensibility, which helps us comprehend that our innate knowledge of good *de facto* derives from a universal and creative principle which prevails across the whole cosmos. By using “embracing the universe (*hangai qiankun*, 涵盖乾坤)” as the second metaphor, Mou packages this objective aspect of intellectual intuition, which transcends humanity, as an ontological and ultimate reality. Last, intellectual intuition can grow to maturity in the course of self-cultivation. In the same process, we become able to formulate practical and unique maxims to respond to concrete life situations. Mou describes this developmental aspect of intellectual intuition as “drifting

⁶⁹ Mou Zongsan, *PT*, 30.

⁷⁰ Mou, *Ibid.*, 40; *NL*, 283-312; *BN*, 451-480. For an insightful analysis of Buddhist influence on Mou’s moral metaphysics, see Tomomi Asakura, “On Buddhistic Ontology: A Comparative Study of Mou Zongsan and Kyoto School Philosophy,” *Philosophy East and West* 61, no. 4 (2011): 647-678. See also Jana Rosker, “The Fusion of Modern Confucianism and Buddhism: Mou Zongsan’s Journey from Double to Fundamental Ontology,” *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 13, no. 1 (2016): 65-66. For the Huayan Buddhist account of One Mind, see the classical *Awakening of Faith* (*Dashengqixinlun*, 《大乘起信论》) and the commentaries by Fazang (法藏, 643-712) the third patriarch of Huayan school. Yoshito Hakeda, trans., *The Awakening of Faith* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Dirck Vorenkamp, *An English Translation of Fa-tsang’s Commentary on the Awakening of Faith* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004).

with the waves (*suibo zhulang*, 随波逐浪).”⁷¹ Now it becomes clear that the key function of intellectual intuition is to present the innate knowledge of good as the moral core of Confucianism. Therefore, exploring the depth and breadth of each aspect of intellectual intuition should help us approach the Confucian account of our innate knowledge of good as the very source of responsibility.

The innate knowledge of good is rational, for it directs our practical life as the moral imperative. Through making moral laws, this imperative targets every actualised inclination in our immoral behaviour and urges us to correct it. This is the *epistemological* aspect of the innate knowledge of good. According to Mou, for a moral imperative to be effective, it must fulfil two requirements. First, it must root itself firmly in our innate knowledge of good. Second, it must also set itself against the selfish inclination within our humanity. In this way, we begin to appreciate that it ultimately upholds the virtues of commonality and impartiality. In the same course, all our selfish desires and inclinations, no matter how strong and secret they are, will be called into question, and it is our innate knowledge of good that will measure them as a judge. This will show the extent to which our inclinations spring from our good will or our evil will, that is, our physical desire for pleasure. Our innate knowledge of good, moreover, will diagnose these inclinations as a doctor does. It will demonstrate the desirability of our moral ideals and actions and affirm them as just and objective virtues. Meanwhile, it will condemn those egoist inclinations or behaviours as unjust and subjective; in other words, they are not qualified to be generalised and therefore followed by others. In brief, by stressing the rational character of our innate knowledge of good, Mou eventually identifies it as an active and transformative power inhabiting our humanity. It legislates and activates upright moral laws to shape our moral sense and raise it to an ever-higher stage.⁷² The possibility of a moral agent depends on this crucial functioning of the innate knowledge of good.

When we understand the working mechanism of the innate knowledge of good in this way, as Mou suggests, we will realise that our innate knowledge of good is not only rational, it must meanwhile be universal and transcendent. In the tradition of Confucianism, people often use the *Principle of Heaven* (*tianli*, 天理) to describe these distinctive features. Wang Yangming’s “our innate knowing of the good is the principle of heaven (*liangzhi ji tianli*, 良知即天理)” is

⁷¹ Mou Zongsan, *MS I*, 119-143; *MI*, 136. Mou borrows the three terms from Chan Buddhism (禅宗) of Song Dynasty. It is Chan Master Yuan Mi (缘密禅师) who first used these terms in his Buddhist teaching which then influenced Confucians of Song and Ming. For a selected record of Master Yuan Mi’s teaching, see Pu Ji, ed., *Five-Light Compendium* (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1984). English translation of the terms is done by the author.

⁷² Mou Zongsan, *MI*, 22.

one of the most notable sayings in this regard. It implies that, first of all, when moral laws are truly initiated by our innate knowledge of good, they immediately obtain a public character and can be shared by any sincere moral practitioner. A typical Confucian would not hesitate to make a list of such moral laws as “be benevolent”, “be righteous”, “behave with propriety” or “do not insult others.” For them, these moral laws are universally valid, regardless of gender, age, race or religion. No matter the moral agent, these laws provide a common way to morality.⁷³ In addition, connecting our innate knowledge of good to the principle of heaven also indicates that the former is transcendental and is thus confirmed by the heavenly principle itself. Its command is always categorical and unconditional. Its order never compromises. It works with absolute authority. Only in this way can it purify our sense of morality and protect it from distraction and deviation.⁷⁴ Mou himself summarises this key moral insight in the following statements,

Only when built on this *a priori* principle without distraction and deviation can people’s moral practice and moral character start to be pure and really stand up. Is not this transcendent principle, if extended to become moral laws, which are legislated and obeyed by human beings, itself an *a priori*, universal principle? This meaning was recognised or decisively affirmed by any authentic and thorough Confucian...From the thorough and absolute moral consciousness, a moral agent must be rooted straight down to her moral rationality where any kind of distraction and deviation is not allowed; for where there is distraction and deviation, there is selfishness and utility. According to Kant, neither selfishness nor utility can be transcendental and universal.⁷⁵

Here Mou is willing to acknowledge that, when Confucians insist that our innate knowledge of good must be universal and transcendent, they certainly share Kant’s concern of a self-legislating will. That is, unless our moral imperative is proved to be independent from all external sources and thus unconditional, it can never become the genuine authority over our moral practice. In real life, correspondingly, genuine effort is required to elevate our humanity

⁷³ Ibid., 23.

⁷⁴ The principle of autonomy is introduced by Kant in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Mou’s “General Introduction” in *Mind-Substance and Nature-Substance* contains lengthy quotations from this work, especially from the two subsections “Classification of All Principles of Morality which can be Founded on the Conception of Heteronomy” and “On the Extreme Limits of Practical Philosophy”, which are both quoted almost completely in Mou’s work, 120–134 and 143–155, respectively. However, the beginning of the latter subsection, where Kant explains why within the framework of his philosophy freedom cannot be a “conception of experience” but only an “idea of reason” – a central point on which Mou later criticizes Kant—is not quoted.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 124.

toward purity, integrity and nobility. Otherwise, our talk of the universality and transcendence of the innate knowledge of good would be in vain. Mou quotes ancient saints to illustrate this point. For instance, Mencius once taught,

Wide territory and a numerous people are desired by the superior man, but what he delights in is not here. To stand in the centre of the kingdom, and tranquillise the people within the four seas – the superior man delights in this, but the highest enjoyment of his nature is not here. What belongs to the superior man by his nature cannot be increased by the largeness of his sphere of action, nor diminished by his dwelling in poverty and retirement – for the reason that it is determinately apportioned to him by Heaven.

As Mou understands, what “the superior man” desires or delights in is different from his highest enjoyment, which belongs to his nature. What this superior man would do is to shift his interest from the external to the internal world of his moral self, for only there he could find his most-valued true heart or the innate knowledge of good. As Mencius continued,

What belongs to the superior man by his nature are benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and knowledge. These are rooted in his heart; their growth and manifestation are a mild harmony appearing in the countenance, a rich fullness in the back, and the character imparted to the four limbs. Those limbs understand how to arrange themselves, without being told.⁷⁶

Agreeing with Mencius, Mou adds that only through a critically reflective effort in “cutting off the crowd” can we expect to approach the superiority of our innate knowledge of good.

The second aspect of the innate knowledge of good is *ontological*, that is, it *itself* is the creative principle in the process of actualisation and fulfilment. According to Mou, for the moral imperative to be universal and transcendental, its ontological basis – the innate knowledge of good – must exist as the source of creation, an insight which marks out Confucianism from the philosophical tradition of the West:

⁷⁶ Mou, *MS I*, 142. Mencius, Tsin Sin Part I., in *The Chinese Classics: The Life and Teachings of Mencius*, trans. James Legge (London: N. Trübner, 1875), 352-353.

Morality is defined by human action in accordance with the unconditionally categorical imperative. Regarding the subject which legislates such imperative, Kant calls it the free will, that is, the self-legislated and autonomous will; while Chinese Confucians name it *Ren* or *the innate knowledge of good*. The latter treatment of moral substance is lacking in Kantian philosophy and in all of Western philosophy.⁷⁷

Mou thus appropriates a Confucian term *nature-substance* (*xingti*, 性体) to signify this objective aspect of the same subject. Nature-substance as an absolute and universal reality, he insists, not because it itself is a Platonist concept of category; it is rather the substance or ultimate being itself. While it inhabits in human beings, it is not confined by them. Correspondingly, while it actualises itself in human moral practices, it is not restricted by them. To be sure, it itself creates and sustains the whole cosmos, and thus becomes the source of all beings. Not only human beings and their morality, but every tree and bush and all living creatures, are nurtured by it. Mou calls it the *principle of creativity* which prevails across the universe. Thanks to intellectual intuition as the principle of ontological actualisation, a sensible person may recognise the scope and impact of its magnificent work and then determine to follow and imitate it. This is the work of *mind-substance* (*xinti*, 心体), the subjective aspect of our innate knowledge of good.⁷⁸ Taken as a whole, the innate knowledge of good not only represents itself and is thus understood in our moral practice, it also cultivates our humanity as moral beings at the same time. It is this key insight that convinced generations of Confucians that, in order to benefit from the creative work of our innate knowledge of good, we must seek the unity of mind-substance and nature-substance. As Mou comments, when the author of the *Book of Odes* (*shijing*, 《诗经》) exclaimed “The ordinances of Heaven, how deep are they and unremitting!” he expressed exactly this profoundly existential experience of such an admirable unity.⁷⁹

But neither mind-substance nor nature-substance exhaust the totality of the innate knowledge of good. A comprehensive understanding of the subject must also include our *enjoyment* (*yue*, 悦). According to Mou, enjoyment as an activity means becoming interested in something and meanwhile, accepting and embracing it. For instance, when our innate

⁷⁷ Mou, *II*, 190, Italics added.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 190-191. The terms *nature-substance* and *mind-substance*, according to Mou, are inherited from Song and Ming Confucians. He attributes one of main contributions of these Confucians to their elaborating of the transcendent and dynamic characteristics of the innate knowledge and moral practices corresponding to it. See Mou, *MS I*, 40-43.

⁷⁹ Mou, *MS I*, 185.

knowledge of good legislates a maxim, it enjoys its own product spontaneously and simultaneously. Mou stresses that enjoyment can be conceived as a specific function of our innate knowledge of good as our free and autonomous will. Its significance lies in its activity as the formative power of human morality.⁸⁰ In this respect, enjoyment is the driving force of good and evil in the very human condition. As we shall see later, Mou tends to set enjoyment as equal to the reflexive element of the developmental aspect of our innate knowledge of good. Without its crucial work, humanity would be trapped in endless desire for physical pleasure. It cannot raise itself to the level of morality and express itself in terms of ideals and values. This is the predicament of humanity. And it is thus the exact meaning of *evil* regarding our human existence.⁸¹ If so, then what is the meaning of good? For Mou, *goodness* is nothing but extricating ourselves from such a plight and freeing our will to its complete and ultimate source in the innate knowledge of good. This is the explicit and effective work of enjoyment.⁸² Properly understood, “enjoyment” is deliberately designated by Mou as a Confucian concept parallel to “respect” in Kantian ethics. The key difference, as he further stresses, is that the activity of enjoyment is inherently clear, tangible and active, while that of respect lacks these features. Mou ascribes Kant’s conceptual weakness to his misleading perception of our goodwill as an abstract subject and thus his distortion of its existential character.⁸³

Given the ontological character of our innate knowledge of good, Mou further explains, the moral truth we get from our intellectual intuition is not discursive or conceptual knowledge, nor is it knowledge mediated by categories of understanding. Intellectual intuition does not represent a state of affairs, it instead attempts to realise a state of affairs. He thus uses the *reflective* component of intellectual intuition (*jue*, 觉) to illuminate an intellectual and spiritual activity through our reflection on moral experiences, which is crucial to confirming the transcendental reality concerning the innate knowledge of good.⁸⁴ Although it can never be fully grasped, we can pursue it through affirmative actions in a case-by-case manner. Neither general rules nor imperatives can guarantee such improvement in the process of self-cultivation.

⁸⁰ Mou, *II*, 194-195; see also *MS I*, 133.

⁸¹ Mou, *MI*, 20. It is this conviction explains Mou’s fierce attack of Marxism (29) and conditional acceptance of Christianity (52, 197).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸³ Mou, *MS I*, 144, 158-161, 166, 195.

⁸⁴ Both the reflective and responsive components (*jue* and *jian*) are adopted from Confucian classics, especially the works of Cheng brothers of North Song Dynasty. For the classical texts and Mou’s interpretations, see Mou, *MS II*, 231-246, 348-366. See also Mou, *MI*, 18-20. For a recent comprehensive study of Cheng brothers’ theory of moral cultivation and a critical review of Mou’s explanations, see Wen Weiyao, *The Way to Sainthood: A Study of Cheng Brothers’ Theory of Self-Cultivation* (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 2006). English translation of these terms is done by the author.

Quoting Mencius, Mou describes the active feature of this reflective movement exemplified by the ancient saint Shun, “when he heard a single good word, or saw a single good action, he was like a stream or a river bursting its banks, and flowing out in an irresistible flood.”⁸⁵ Likewise, in the life practice of Confucius, he finds a paradigmatic way of seeking sainthood. Confucius dedicated his thought and work to pursue the real knowledge of good. But he did not approach it in an analytical and abstract manner; rather, he strove to actualise it in his own concrete, sincere and compassionate way of life.⁸⁶ For later generations who have been inspired by Confucius, Mou argues, their innate knowledge of good always presents itself in a paradoxical manner: practical but universal, immanent but transcendent. Only in this way can it transform our humanity and elevate it to sainthood.

The last aspect of our innate knowledge of good is a *practical* one. Compared to the Kantian speculation about free will, Mou stresses that the Confucian emphasis is rather on its fulfilment (*jin*, 尽).⁸⁷ In his terminology, this is the work of the *responsive* component (*jian*, 健) of intellectual intuition, which illustrates the practical nature of our moral formation. It implies that human moral action is fundamentally a response to our innate knowledge of good along with our growing self-identification of sainthood. Following the teachings of Confucius, he regards this responsive practice as a life-long activity in every kind of human relationship and situation. For him the bondage of desires, physically or psychologically, is the primary obstacle to human moral perfection. Since every kind of desire is born out of a concrete situation, the very task of overcoming our own “evil” must remain active and industrious. In other words, the choice between the good will and the evil will is always a dynamic one. The responsibility of the moral agent means a decisive rejection of the latter through an affirmative response to the intimate conscience. Here we find that Mou’s conception of responsible practice consists of a strong critical character. Thanks to the active practice of our intellectual intuition, we can expect an increasingly clear vision of and live in harmony with the prevailing, creative principle, which links us to the realms of creation. In brief, our intellectual intuition can grow to maturity in the course of critically reflexive activities until we become able to formulate practical and unique maxims to respond to concrete life situations. Mou describes this developmental aspect of intellectual intuition as “drifting with the waves.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Mencius, Tsin Sin Part I., in *The Chinese Classics*, 350-351.

⁸⁶ Mou, *MS I*, 121-122, 131-132.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 121, 142.

The way towards sainthood is a developmental process from what our humanity is to what it ought to be. Correspondingly, a moral concept of responsibility is a desire not merely to do something good, but to become good. In Mou's understanding, the latter is defined neither by a state of affairs nor by a set of abstract values. For our genuine sense of moral responsibility to be effective, it must be understood as a process towards an authentic moral agent or the Noble Person, which includes two crucial aspects:

The "subject of practice" presents itself by opening up our lives in the form of "succeeding to the work of Heaven and establishing the norm for all to follow (*jitian liji*, 继天立极)" and nurturing our lives with virtue and wisdom. Accordingly, what can be derived from the subject of practice, first and foremost, is the moral practice of the individuals in their ethical performance and saintly character in terms of morality and religion. Its significance in cultural establishment is to enlighten humankind and sustain humanity from deprivation. It thus functions as a source and a system. This is the orthodox tradition of "*Dao*", or "*Daotong* (道统)" in brief. Second, it includes political practice of the collectives which historically demonstrate "*Dao*" with saintly characters in terms of morality and religion. The way of representation can be specified by the "political form" it itself developed in historical evolution.⁸⁹

Individually, the responsible practice of Confucians is a spiritual response to the calling from their innate knowledge of good, and during the same process, a truly freedom of moral subject through transformation and transcendence of humanity is achieved.⁹⁰ Collectively, the formative process of responsibility for Confucians must take social engagement seriously, for the latter links the responsible self to others in real life and thus define the breadth of responsible practice. According to Mou, these insights can be traced to the major teachings of Mencius and Wang Yangming concerning the exercise of self-cultivation. The elaboration of these two aspects will be the subjects of chapter 4 and 5 respectively. Here it is enough to say that Mou treats them as equally important, avoiding any one-sided emphasis. Only in this way can we expect to gain maturity in our moral character and make responsible choices in life towards sainthood.⁹¹ Given this full scale of Confucian moral teachings, Mou would quickly reject Barth's claim that only Christian ethics can understand the full significance of responsibility.

⁸⁹ Mou, *MI*, 143-145.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

⁹¹ Mou, *MS I*, 174.

3.5 Comparative observations

Now we can summarise the major convergences and divergences between Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan in terms of their ethical architectures. For Barth, there are three essential features of the divine command as the source of responsibility. First and foremost, the *personal* character of the divine command is bound to the act of single person, Jesus Christ. When He claims us, decides us and judges us, He actualises the gracious will of God and makes us a new creation. Only in Him and through Him do we know that the will of God is good; meanwhile, we know we have been transformed to be God's responsible partners through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, since we accept the superiority, authority and validity of the command of God in Jesus Christ, the divine command thus becomes a *transcendent* imperative which summons us to free obedience for our own good. As Barth remarks,

The obligation revealed and grounded in the person and work and lordship of Jesus Christ fulfils the idea in all its strictness. It is a categorical imperative, not merely in name, but in fact. And as such – unlike the Kantian imperative – it reveals the fact that to obey it is not merely the highest duty but also the highest good. It is the moving and illuminating and uplifting of man – inextricably involved in the ideas and aims proper to his own will – by the goodness of the free transcendent divine will.⁹²

For Barth, as the only true and valid imperative, the divine command finds its transcendent character in its Christological foundations. Last, both the personal and transcendent character of the divine command call for a third character: it must be *concrete* enough that it leaves no space for interpretation and deliberation. It simply requires either obedience or disobedience.⁹³ The purity of the divine imperative is manifested in its independence from human reason, feelings, will or experience. In other words, it is not subject to our sinful nature.

As a Confucian thinker, Mou Zongsan believes that only the innate knowledge of good is qualified to become the proper source of responsibility. Inspired by Kant, he discusses this moral subject with assistance of an epistemological tool. He suggests that our intellectual intuition, if properly designated, can be a reliable guide to lead us to the *transcendent* reality of our moral existence. That is, our innate knowledge of good as a rational, universal and absolute subject is itself an incarnated form of the creative principle beyond humanity. Through

⁹² Barth, *CD* II.2, 652.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 667, 669, 673, 710.

reflective activities, intellectual intuition can drive us to the spring of morality and nurture our moral being. At this critical point, Mou insists that the work of intellectual intuition is nothing but one of the crucial functions of our innate knowledge of good. Or, using Mou's own terms, intellectual intuition can be seen here as a positive principle of ontological actualisation. A typical Confucian way of ethical reflection is thus approaching our innate knowledge through intellectual intuition, accepting that the former is the very origin of the latter and then embracing it with humility and respect. Only by so doing can we finally realise that, quite against the Kantian formulation, the epistemological object of our moral self is not merely theoretical and formal, but also tangible and accessible. It itself is a moral truth which can be actualised as a concrete and living reality.⁹⁴

Moreover, such epistemological undertakings would be pointless without *practical* concern. For generations of Confucians and especially those Song-Ming neo-Confucians, the purpose of knowing is not merely so-called theoretical truth, it also includes moral wisdom in practice. It is this second aspect of our innate knowledge of good that entails a unity of moral knowledge and moral action (or principle and practice). Therefore, Mou suggests that we as moral beings can use our reason not only in a speculative way, but also in a practical way. Correspondingly, the validity of moral truth for us depends not only on objective illustration or recognition, but also on our subjective witness and reception. The fundamental reason is that our moral actions by nature must be responsive to our innate knowledge of good in concrete living situations. To be more accurate, it is our responsible practice that paves a rigorous way for our moral formation. Finally, Mou reminds us that the cultivation of the responsible self must be associated with *personal* encounters with nobility in words and deeds. For him this is the conventional wisdom of Confucianism. This explains his own intellectual and existential engagement with the great Confucian figures, from the ancients Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi to the late-Ming Wang Yangming. It also explains Mou's suspicion of Kantian theoretical and abstract speculation in our moral formation. Most importantly, since all these moral agents are exemplary historical figures, it sets up the potential and the boundary for people's responsible life inspired by a living moral tradition. Therefore, far from setting some vague, abstract or generalised utopian objectives in the pursuit of human perfection, the concrete meaning of the responsible self is defined by her dialogical relationship with those saints.

To bring these observations together, we can conclude that both Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan stress that the source of responsibility must be counted as a fundamental human reality

⁹⁴ Mou, *II*, 198.

rather than a Kantian postulate. They both identify ultimate being(s) in action as the source of responsibility. On closer examination, it is even more striking to find that both have a personal, transcendent and practical characters. Nevertheless, there remains a remarkable difference between the two thinkers. Their ethics of responsibility exhibit two distinctive formulations, with the source of responsibility formulated from divine agency and human agency. Given the fundamental disagreements about the particular source of responsibility, the difference seems ultimately unresolvable since both Barth and Mou insist on valid proof, but not from outside their traditions. Even in this contentious issue, the two thinkers are not resigned to mutual rejections but can learn from each other as well as from their traditions if they can read each other charitably. For instance, Barth could correct Mou's image of a transcendent God as a perfect remote being: He is instead an intimate covenantal partner to us, revealed in Jesus Christ when He claims us, decides us, and judges us. Mou could remind Barth that focusing on human agency need not be a return to the nineteenth-century liberal obsession on the religious subject centred on personal piety and feeling, but instead is a compelling obligation for oneself through reflexive and responsive practice in various living circumstances. Indeed, honest recognition of other facets of the human condition, as well as their moral significance, would not require a sacrifice of either Barth's or Mou's particular commitments but would allow them to supplement each other to satisfy the requirements of a promising version of responsibility.

As we have noticed, the Kantian ethic provides their intellectual background as the ethics of responsibility, relying on general moral rules. The technical term for such a system is *rule-deontology*, which emphasises the importance of obedience to a moral imperative regardless of the results of actions. The imperative to be obeyed, in turn, can be stated in the form of general rules that apply to everyone's conduct in a certain context. However, if we think more deeply, two serious criticisms will rise against this ethical formulation. First, in pursuing a pure and transcendent concept of moral imperative, as well as insisting on an optimistic view of human reason, Kant insufficiently addresses the issue of desirability and practicability of moral principles in real life situations represented by typical humanity (Jesus for Barth; saints for Mou). Meanwhile, by separating moral knowledge and moral action, and by putting more emphasis on the former, Kant sacrifices concreteness of imperative for its general features. As a result, he inevitably undermines the power of the moral imperative in real human affairs. It is therefore not surprising to find that many post-Kant thinkers, such as Hegel and Marx, charged that the Kantian concept of free will was unrealistic. Second, since Kant merely claims an ideal and does not respond to real situations and relationships in society, his teachings can be easily

appropriated by dictators to justify any kind of benevolent despotism (as Friedrich the Great in fact did) and to persuade the public to endure it for the sake of so-called progress.⁹⁵

Aware of these negative lessons, Barth and Mou choose other ways to formulate their ethics of responsibility. Indeed, Barth stresses the specificity of the divine command to human situations. He insists that rules or generalizations cannot encompass all that God's judgement may be saying and cannot predict in advance what that judgement will be. Likewise, Mou stresses the specificity of the innate knowledge of good to a very concrete struggle against corruption and deprivation of humanity. But while the Kantian emphasis on obedience was shared by Barth and Mou, the emphasis on general rules was not. The effect, therefore, is to call all rules into question and to focus our attention back on the unique act. For this reason, we can say that the type of ethics they both endorse can be described as an *act-deontology*.⁹⁶ Now the duty can be known only as a requirement to do a specific deed in a specific situation. In other words, our genuine responsibility can never be found in a general rule. It is fundamentally a response to the concrete calling from the divine command or the innate knowledge of good. The new formulation allows Barth and Mou to stress the practical dimension of responsibility without sacrificing its normative sources. Moral knowledge and moral action can be reunited, the full power of the sources of our responsibility can be rediscovered, and overall, the Kantian conceptual weaknesses in moral practice can be overcome. As Lovin observes, the reason Barth corrects a Kantian conception of responsibility in his own ethics is his attempt to overthrow all the theological systems and programs in which his contemporaries had placed their confidence, as well as his attempt to recover the basic meaning of a genuine encounter with God. This was his decisive response to Germany's moral and social chaos after the Great War. We may add that the reason Mou transforms a Kantian conception of responsibility in his own ethics is his attempt to demonstrate the source of our responsibility as a tangible and dialogical reality, cultivating our sense of responsibility as a constant and highly contextualised moral exercise. Both these beliefs for Mou are derived from the supreme wisdom of Confucianism and witnessed by the generations of Confucian ideals and practices. What links Barth and Mou here is much more than a common intellectual endeavour. Rather, it is the necessity of uniting theory with praxis. Once the first aspect of the practical theories of responsibility becomes clear, then we can draw more attention to the second aspect, that is, the action of responsibility.

⁹⁵ The first famous critique in this regard can be found in Hamann's review of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, see Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit*, 59.

⁹⁶ This observation has been confirmed by Barth experts such as Robert Wills and Robin Lovin. See Robert Wills, *The Ethics of Karl Barth* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 157-171; Robin Lovin, *Christian Faith and Public Choices: The Social Ethics of Barth, Brunner, and Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 24-28.

Chapter 4

Responsibility and the Routes of Moral Formation

4.1 Introduction

The elaboration of the action of responsibility is the theme of the current chapter, and the second task of our comparative project. For the action of responsibility, we mean the organisation of a responsible way of life as defined by religious or moral traditions, with our primary focus on the ethical accounts of Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan. Here our previous findings become the starting point of a new venture. In Chapter 3, we examined the distinct formulations of responsibility in terms of its ultimate source. Specifically, Barth sees the ultimate source of human responsibility as the divine command of God in Jesus Christ, while Mou treats the innate knowledge of good as the supreme source of our responsibility. Nevertheless, when we shifted our attention to the forms of these sources, it was striking to find that they are both transcendent, concrete and personal. This is because both Barth and Mou, in their critical responses to the Kantian ethics, insist that the source of responsibility must be seen as a fundamental human reality rather than an ideal. They believe that, unlike any abstract principle, only these moral subjects, with these characteristics, are qualified to be counted as the ultimate sources of responsibility. For them, these subjects make imperatives for human beings concretely and contextually and call for their immediate obedience without deliberation. These subjects also provide direction, motivation and force for the growth of the responsible self. In other words, the nature of the moral subjects determines the genuine form and proper practice of responsible action. The principal lesson to be learned here is this: to understand the deep truth of our moral formation we need to make clear the crucial relationship between the subject and the self. The priority must always be the character and work of the former.

Now we can move to another aspect of responsibility as the logical deduction of our previous conclusion: responsible human ethical actions corresponding to these ultimate sources. Karl Barth uses the concept of vocation to denote such primary action. For Mou Zongsan, the key concept which characterises our primary action is retrospective verification (*nijue tizheng*, 逆觉体证). To facilitate a thick description and comparison of these actions, we propose a cluster of questions. They include: What are the forms and purposes of these actions? Why are they so important for human agents in moral formation? What are the benefits or advantages for us when we are determined to do them? What are the disadvantages, limitations or

challenges, if any? What do they mean for the different subjects in a relationship? How can they be implemented in one's real-life practice? Finally, regarding the process, are these actions accumulative, transformative, or both? By addressing these issues, we at first aim to understand the meaning and significance of these primary actions of responsibility proposed by Barth and Mou. Then we discuss the problems of their desirability and practicability, particularly concerning their continuity in the process of moral formation. As we shall see, when Barth and Mou elaborate these responsible actions, they both identify, confirm and develop certain trains of thought within their distinct traditions of Christianity and Confucianism. These efforts allow them to go beyond the modern horizon of moral formation. Moreover, by so doing, they are able to articulate strong teleological elements in their act-deontological ethics, stressing the alternation of the human situation and the new telos of the responsible self. We conclude the chapter with a comparison of their ethical architectures and practical significance.

4.2 The action of responsibility in Karl Barth's ethics of vocation

For Barth, any theological understanding of genuine Christian action involves living within a circle of first receiving and then responding to the divine grace. There is in this circle “a direct and concrete confrontation of the divine and corresponding human action, the former kindling the latter and the latter kindled by it.”⁹⁷ Within these double movements, the responsible action of an ethical agent can be understood only “in the light of the fact that it may correspond to the divine action in his favour, doing justice to the grace addressed to him.”⁹⁸ When Barth formulates this theological idea precisely and faithfully, he has to find a place for the conception of the covenant in his dogmatics, as his Reformed forerunners did. This need arises not only because the term is a recurring – even prevailing – concept in the narratives of the Old and New Testaments, but also because, since John Calvin, “covenant” has come to be the central Reformed means of demonstrating the relationship between God and humanity.⁹⁹ Nurtured in the positive evangelical theology of the Reformed Church, Barth in his work and thought

⁹⁷ Karl Barth, *CD* IV.3, 546.

⁹⁸ Karl Barth, *CD* III.2, 74.

⁹⁹ According to McGowan, from Calvin the theology of covenant was developed further by the Heidelberg theologians Caspar Olevianus (1536-87) and Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83), then was popularized by the Cambridge theologian William Perkins (1558-1602) and was significantly advanced by the later German theologian Johannes Cocceius (1603-69). By the end of seventeenth century, while covenant theology was expressed in various ways, it had become the dominant position within Reformed tradition. See A. T. B. McGowan, “Karl Barth and Covenant Theology”, in *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 114-115.

continually reveals the masterful influence of Calvin.¹⁰⁰ The historical analysis of Sung Wook Chung shows that Barth's theological engagement with Calvin was constant and serious throughout his life. The name of this theological giant of the Reformation is ubiquitous in Barth's academic works, sermons, lectures and pamphlets.¹⁰¹ It is therefore not surprising to see that, when Barth develops his instructions for responsible human action in his general doctrines of reconciliation and of vocation, Calvin is the primary intellectual source. Although recent years has witnessed a genuine interest in human moral action among Barth scholars, little attention has been paid to his doctrine of vocation as well as its intellectual origins.¹⁰² As a response, we offer here a thorough analysis of Barth's conception of vocation in relation to that of Calvin.

The central concept Barth inherited from Calvin was *participation in Christ* or *participatio Christi*, with Calvin's theology of covenant as its background. Barth found that Calvin's conception of participation in Christ laid the foundation of his doctrines of justification and sanctification, which then set up the telos of the new man in his doctrine of calling. For Calvin, the defining characteristics of Christian existence – justification, reconciliation and vocation – depended upon participation in Christ according to the gracious action of Christ in the perfect covenant. Hence Calvin himself used the term “covenant” as an overarching concept in his Reformed theology, and he focused insistently on the Christ-centred covenant of grace.¹⁰³ Barth, in his early lectures on the theology of John Calvin, emphasises Calvin's insight into the covenant established between God and humanity through Christ's assumption of human flesh.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas F. Torrance, “Introduction”, in *Karl Barth, Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920-1928*, trans. Louise Smith (London: SCM Press, 1962), 15.

¹⁰¹ Sung Wook Chung, *Admiration & Challenge: Karl Barth's Theological Relationship with John Calvin* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 15-122. For a critical assessment of Barth's reading of reformed tradition as a historical theologian, see Ryan Glomsrud, “Karl Barth as Historical Theologian: The recovery of Reformed theology in Barth's early dogmatics,” in *Engaging with Barth*, 84-112.

¹⁰² Maybe the most important contributor to this topic is John Webster. See John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and *Barth's Earlier Theology: Four Studies* (London: T&T Clark, 2005). Alongside the works of Webster are Paul Nimmo's *Being in Action* and Gerald McKenny's *The Analogy of Grace*. See Paul Nimmo, *Being in Action: The theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007); Gerald McKenny, *The Analogy of Grace: Karl Barth's Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). All these works, however, only occasionally address Barth's conception of vocation which is far behind their extensive study on his other doctrines. One exception in recent scholarly literature is Rhys Kuzmič, “*Beruf* and *Berufung* in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*: Toward a Subversive Klesiology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7, no. 3 (2005): 262-278. The author usefully distinguishes Barth's understanding of vocation and calling in his CD III.4, that is, “vocation (*Beruf*) for Barth is the totality of the individual's socio-historical context which that individual brings to the hearing of the divine call (*Berufung*)” (265). However, the same author did not discuss Calvin's influence on Barth's formulation of the concept of vocation.

¹⁰³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 2.10 and 2.11. A recent compelling study of historical theology shows that the idea of the covenant of works which laid the seeds of the later development of covenant theology has been there in Calvin's account. See Peter Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

He agrees with Calvin concerning the representative character of Jesus Christ in his redemptive and atoning work, and its implications for Christian existence. “In him we, too, are in heaven, chosen before the foundation of the world according to the same good pleasure of God that has made him ours, redeemed, accepted, reconciled, put under his protection, planted in him, in him already entering in hope the kingdom of God.”¹⁰⁴ For this reason, Barth further embraces Calvin’s idea of the union between Christ and his followers. “Always Christ is in reality both the one who justified us *without* us and the one who dwells and works and initiates *within* us as the giver of the new life in us.”¹⁰⁵ In this way, Barth rightly considers Calvin as a theologian of sanctification, with the third book of Calvin’s 1536 *Institutes* as the classic example. Moreover, for Barth, that book’s section on Christian liberty reveals most clearly that Calvin was a great theological ethicist of human freedom. Calvin (unlike Luther, Barth said) interrelated Christian freedom and ecclesiastical and political order on the basis of his conviction that “the truly free person is the one who is captive to God.”¹⁰⁶ Later, when Barth expresses the significance of vocation for our human beings, this insight has become the single important reality he feels obligated to discover. In his terms, this reality indicates that, only in our submission to the divine command of God can we find our way towards liberation for our individual lives and for our communities.

While recognising Calvin’s valuable and inspiring contributions, Barth is also clear about the weaknesses in Calvin’s doctrine of vocation. For Barth, the very definition of the Christian depends upon the goal of vocation; this is the dominant theme of the third book of the *Institutes*, where Calvin correctly addresses the issue, i.e., in his concept of union with Christ. However, as Barth cautions, Calvin stopped halfway, leaving his project uncompleted. First, Calvin seemingly failed to grasp the formal character of our union with Christ as a series of absolutely certain historical events. According to Barth, this stemmed from Calvin’s problematic doctrine of the eternal election of believers (rather than all people),¹⁰⁷ and from Calvin’s untenable retention of a mysterious residue from medieval theology.¹⁰⁸ On the contrary, Barth stresses the historical and spiritual character of our vocation, which is both determined by and must correspond to the Christ event of the same (dual) character. Second and more importantly, Barth recognises that Calvin did not persist in drawing out the full consequences of our union with

¹⁰⁴ Karl Barth, *TJC*, 166.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 167. Italics in original.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁰⁷ Barth, *CD IV.3*, 484-486. For a careful examination of Barth’s criticism of Calvin’s doctrine of election and his own usage of the same concept, see Sung, *Admiration & Challenge*, chapter 5, 177-220.

¹⁰⁸ Barth, *CD IV.3*, 539-540.

Christ.¹⁰⁹ To be specific, for Barth, Calvin's notion of participation in Christ denotes everything concerning our normative role in the covenantal relationship, as well as its realisation. However, while Calvin revealed the significance of "vocation" in his concepts of justification and sanctification, he isolated the theme from its centre, which prevented him from specifying the goal of our calling and from providing meaningful direction for our responsible actions.¹¹⁰ To push forward Calvin's unfinished task, Barth reformulates Calvin's doctrine of vocation by situating the normative basis of Christian calling firmly in *participatio Christi*. He attempts to show that our participation in Christ means participation not only in a perfect relationship with Christ, but also in the good works of Christ as His witnesses and disciples.¹¹¹ Only in this balanced view is a more comprehensive reading of the purpose of vocation possible. In Barth's hands, Calvin's original idea is faithfully advanced, creatively extended, as the controlling concept of human responsible life. Now let us examine his doctrine of vocation in more detail.

Barth defines vocation as the *event* in which a human agent is set and instituted in actual fellowship with Jesus Christ in the service of God and her fellow agents. It is the event in which the grace of God, who justifies one before Him and sanctifies her for Him, finds its response in her gratitude. The theme of vocation is always the act of God in Jesus Christ in His ministry of reconciliation.¹¹² With this general definition of vocation, Barth offers two crucial presuppositions and emphasises that neither can be confused with or undermined by the other. First, vocation as an event is *historical* and *temporal*: the vocation of a human agent is a unique and concrete event in which God encounters her in history. More precisely, it is the occurrence and coming into being of a relationship between God and human beings in a unique time and space in accordance with the particular person and work of Jesus Christ.¹¹³ It is in the history of Jesus Christ that the eternal election of human beings – and therefore their temporal vocations in their own lives – can find their true basis. For Jesus Christ has not elected for this or that particular individual but all people for Himself. He has taken away *all* the rejection of *all* people as sinners, which had separated them from God. Therefore, in Jesus Christ, no one is rejected; all are elected to their justification, sanctification and also vocation. In Him, the divine work of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 551-552.

¹¹⁰ Barth raises this criticism with great appreciation: "However that may be, Reformed theology has kept alive the recognition that the vocation of the elect consists essentially in his *unio cum Christo*, and therefore in all its aspects is to be understood accordingly. In Reformed orthodoxy as in Calvin himself there was no systematic outworking or exploitation of this insight in relation to the whole doctrine of vocation. But we may be grateful that it brought it out strongly at least from the standpoint of arrangement." Ibid., 554.

¹¹¹ According to Paul Nimmo, this crucial point can be seen as the centre of Barth's doctrine of sanctification. See Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 174, cf. 34.

¹¹² Barth, *CD* IV.3, 482.

¹¹³ Ibid., 483.

reconciliation has been merely effected for human agents without any co-operation or presence on their part.¹¹⁴ For these reasons, Barth affirms that the divine election of grace must be the single basis of vocation, for by the work of Jesus Christ the human situation has been universally altered, and everyone – including the uncalled – stands already bathed in the light of life. He thus expresses reservations about Calvin’s doctrine of predestination, because Calvin perceived God’s eternal election as only for the elected.¹¹⁵ With a great certainty, and a hope even for the uncalled, Barth states the immediate implications of this bold theological leap for our practical responsibility to others:

If it is the case that the vocation to be a Christian, even though it does not by a long way take place in each life, determines the situation of every man to the extent that it is the future or telos of his existence, this implies a responsibility of every man and thus compels the Christian to see and understand not only himself but also the non-Christian in his responsibility, and to address him in terms of it. The reference is not to a general moral or human responsibility which might be interpreted as man's obligation to his conscience or character or way, or to certain supposed or real orders and forces of the cosmos. It is to the fact that every man, as he co-exists as such with Jesus Christ, stands in the light of life, that the Word of God is directed to him too, that it comes to him, that he is to be called and that he is thus made responsible to the One who calls him. He does not make himself responsible. He is made responsible by this One. To be responsible means to be ordained to see the light of life, to hear and receive the Word of God. He is able and under obligation to do this. He is free to do it.¹¹⁶

Second, the process of vocation as an event is temporal or historical, but it is also *spiritual*. As Martin Luther confessed, “The Holy Ghost has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith.”¹¹⁷ For Barth, Luther’s confession contains everything regarding our vocation as a spiritual event. As the Spirit of the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit must be the power of the Gospel itself which has called, enlightened, sanctified and preserved humans in the true faith. In this action, He is not only the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 486-487.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 484-485.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 494-495, also 509.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 501.

theme and content of the Gospel but also its origin with divine power. But this power for human beings must not be misconceived as a somehow independent force between Jesus Christ and them who are called by Him. At this crucial point, Barth insightfully reminds us that the power of the Holy Spirit is none other than the power of the divine Word of God, that is, the power of Jesus Christ in His presence and action. As the Author of the Gospel, Jesus Christ Himself speaks the truth with clarity and invincibility and witnesses in himself to this truth. And He gives the Spirit who calls and enlightens and sanctifies and preserves. Therefore, He is the substance and goal of the whole work of the Spirit. As in his formulation of the first presupposition, here in his description of vocation as a spiritual process, Barth continues to focus on the factual consequences of the liberating power of Jesus Christ in his Spirit. Whether from a historical or spiritual angle, the emphasis is always laid on the objective character of Jesus Christ. As we indicated in Chapter 3 and anticipated above, it is the transcendent, dynamic and personal character of Jesus Christ as the very Word of God that guarantees our vocation. In this way, Barth deliberately avoids what later Reformed theology – and Schleiermacher in particular – ventured: a psychological interpretation of vocation, confining it to our inner state of sanctification and spiritual growth.¹¹⁸ For him, only in this way can we say Jesus Christ is the acting Subject of the process of vocation. Also, only in this sense is human vocation a genuinely historical and spiritual process: for us, it is not merely psychical but physical; not merely spiritual but moral, social and political; not merely invisible but also visible. In other words, it comprehensively transforms the human situation. Only then can we speak of the real strength of the process of vocation.¹¹⁹

After providing these presuppositions of vocation, Barth proceeds to examine the process of vocation in more depth. His first question concerns the general nature of when our vocation takes place, that is, what really happens in the encounter between human agents and the Holy Spirit? He acknowledges that in human existence this process is usually reflected in division, disruption and relativisation, which tend to confuse rather than reveal the essence. Hence it is preferable to understand vocation instead from the divine side, namely, the work of Jesus Christ, who in it acts towards human agents.¹²⁰ Accordingly, Barth suggests two concepts to grasp this formal character of vocation. The first – and principal – concept is *illumination*. As he states,

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 498.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 501-503.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 507.

The distinctive element in the event of [a man's] vocation, in which Jesus Christ in person meets him as a person and becomes a known and conscious element in his life-history, is that the light, Jesus Christ as the light of the world, illuminates this man. It does not now merely shine for him in general. It now shines for him in such a way that his closed eyes are opened by its shining, or rather his blind eyes are healed by its shining and made to see. This is the process of vocation. Man is called and becomes a Christian as he is illuminated.¹²¹

For Barth, when we consider the process of vocation in its formal character as illumination, we are not dealing with a minor part, or simply a beginning in which a person becomes a Christian. Instead, it is the totality of her temporal and historical experience of the living Jesus Christ in the most diverse and separated forms. In addition to illumination, Barth also proposes a second concept – *awakening* – as a supplement to describing the process of vocation. He notices that this term gives the process of illumination a particularly dynamic emphasis because it sharply contrasts two human situations. Specifically, awakening describes the turning of a person from passing to coming; from the false to the true; from sleep to wakefulness; and, finally, from existence as determined by eyes and ears which are closed to existence as determined by eyes and ears which are open.¹²² In other words, the Gospel which is imparted to a human agent is valid, and the knowledge of God established by it is active. Taking advantage of these two concepts, Barth interprets human vocation as a dynamic process in which Jesus Christ addresses and transforms a person's whole being, making her into a Christian. This is the formal character of vocation.

What, then, is the meaning and purpose of human vocation? And what is the telos of the alternation which takes place as human agents become the hearers of the Word of God and then are illuminated and awakened? As Barth goes deeper by examining the material aspect of vocation, he provides a two-fold answer which signifies his noteworthy contribution to the theme and which deserves our serious attention. The first part of the answer has a *relational* perspective. As above, for Barth the purpose of a person's vocation is that she should become a Christian, a *homo christianus*.¹²³ But what does it mean to be a Christian? Here Luther again serves as the authoritative source, with his well-known phrase, "I believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord." For Barth, this statement summarises the whole substance regarding Christians'

¹²¹ Ibid., 508.

¹²² Ibid., 513. See also Barth's discussion of the concept in his doctrine of sanctification. Barth, *CD* IV.2, 553-583.

¹²³ Barth, *CD* IV.3, 521.

identity and status, that is, their union with Christ.¹²⁴ Following Calvin, Barth deliberately chooses *union* as the key term, i.e., a conjunction of the two in which each has his own independence, uniqueness and activity. Neither loses its specific character, role and function in relation to the other. In this way, the term “union” seems more appropriate than “attachment” or “coordination” because it helps us see the distinct nature of one’s fellowship with Christ: it is actual and not ideal; total and not merely psychical/intellectual; indissoluble and not transitory. Most importantly, in the union, the reciprocal relationship of the two partners is irreversible. As Barth insists, this is seen as the defining character of one’s union with Christ:

If we are to understand the nature of this union, then, in relation to the emphasised independence, uniqueness and activity of Jesus Christ on the one side and the Christian on the other, we do well to begin, not below with the Christian, but above with Jesus Christ as the Subject who initiates and acts decisively in this union. We do well to begin with the union of Christ with the Christian and His self-giving to the Christian, and not vice versa. It is here that the union and self-giving of the Christian have their roots.¹²⁵

This is also why Barth holds Luther’s eight-word confession in such high esteem: he sees in it a clear-cut and steadfast recognition of the Lordship of Christ.

Grounded by a lengthy and thoughtful biblical exegesis, Barth identifies three different expressions of the union with Christ in the New Testament. The first is “*In Christ*”. As the goal

¹²⁴ Ibid., 527.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 540-541. On another occasion, Barth explains that the union with Christ is the content of our illumination: “And the goal of the vocation of man is the man who actively knows himself as one who is given into the hands of the Son of God, and who thus lives in the knowledge that he does not belong to himself but to his Lord. In the event of vocation he is led to this insight. And in it he is made over and freely delivers himself *de facto* to the One to whom He belongs *de iure*, as he is also transferred and freely escapes *de facto* from the one to whom he does not belong *de iure*, namely, himself. He finds himself placed, and thus places himself, in the hands of the One to whom as owner there belongs the sole and total *responsibility* and care for his existence and its guidance and direction, since He has taken it upon Himself by electing Himself from all eternity for him, by electing him from all eternity for God and His salvation, and by fulfilling this election in intervening and offering up Himself for him in time. And he also finds himself taken out of his own hands and freed from the useless concern of *responsibility* for providing for and governing his own existence, by recognizing himself, and being able to exist freely, as the possession of the One who long ago, indeed, from all eternity, came forth to restore what he had ruined, and could only ruin, as his own owner and lord. In this self-understanding to which he is awakened by his vocation, the super- and sub-ordination in his fellowship with the One who calls him, the structure of this fellowship as revealed in the fact that He calls him to discipleship and he himself allows himself to be called to discipleship, can only be natural and self-evident. In this structure the fellowship of the Christian with Christ is solidly grounded and ordered yet also free, because it is a fellowship which is rooted in the free grace of the Word spoken to him, which grows and renews itself from this, which never gives rest without a holy unrest, nor unrest without a holy rest.” Ibid., 534-537. Italics added. In this paragraph Barth masterfully interweaves the formal and the material aspects of vocation, with a stress on the shifting concerns of responsibility in our self-understanding.

of vocation, it means that “Christ lives where this man, the Christian, is, in his time and place, in the sphere of his free thinking, volition, resolution and action, in such a way that He takes up His abode in what is most proper and remains most proper to him, in his innermost being or heart, being present there as the Lord of the house and understanding him better than he understands himself.” Seen from another side, it means that “where Christ is, with Him in His time and place, in the centre of His intention and action, in such a way that in the use of His distinctive sovereignty, which remains proper to Him, Christ is not a stranger but his best known and trusted Neighbour whom he understands better than he does himself.”¹²⁶ In this way, Barth sees the goal of vocation as nothing more or less than the self-giving of Christ to the Christian and the Christian to Christ. Moreover, as Jesus Christ calls humans in the work of His Spirit, they immediately exist in particular proximity to Him and thus in analogy to who He is: the Son of God. In an analogical manner, this means that we may become *sons of God*. Barth thus conceives the goal of human vocation as divine sonship. Through this second lens, we can see that the true being of Christians is fashioned and determined by the fatherly basis and origin of their existence. As children of God, as Barth points, they “exist in repetition, confirmation and revelation not only of the manner but also of the will and act of God as the One from whom they derive.”¹²⁷ More precisely, as Jesus Christ calls someone as a child of God and thus makes her a sister, she is therefore set in a particular fellowship with Him. As Barth interprets, the language of the New Testament of this fellowship is *koinonia* or *communicatio*, a relationship between two persons in which they are brought into perfect mutual coordination within the frame of a definite order, but with no destruction of their distinct identity and character (rather, in fact, in their confirmation and expression).¹²⁸ The Gospels’ description of such fellowship is the calling to be *disciples of Jesus Christ*. As the third and last term, discipleship gives an accurate account of the relationship between Jesus Christ and His followers: a history in which Jesus chooses the common way and treads it first, and then His disciples follow in His steps.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ibid., 594.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 533.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 535. In another occasion, Barth gives a more detailed indication of discipleship, see Barth, *CD* IV.2, 533-552.

¹²⁹ In terms of the particularity of one’s discipleship, Barth explains: “He believes in Jesus, not in a theoretical and general way, as in a good leader alongside whom there might be others, but in such a way that He is the inescapable Leader who leaves him no option but to go after Him on the way which He has chosen. And believing in Him, he obeys Him, again not in a general or theoretical way which enables or even perhaps constrains him to think and speak and act in detail according to some standards of his own, but in such a way that his own sovereignty is completely forfeit and he does exactly distinguishes though it does not separate him from other men. For as he is told even in detail. And obeying Him, he confesses Him, again not just theoretically-and whether or not in words is only a secondary question-but quite unequivocally by publicly entering the way which is chosen by Him, by irrevocably and bindingly accepting his own relationship to Him, by thus compromising himself with Him, by making himself a fool for His sake, as we must add for the sake of clarity. Hence he does not belong to Jesus in a

He is the good and inescapable leader, and they are His intimate and obedient companions. Therefore, the discipleship of the Christian, as the history of her fellowship with Jesus Christ, provides unambiguous direction for her own life and embraces her whole life as a continuous vocation.

Once the reality of union with Christ as well as its compound meanings has been illustrated by these biblical concepts, it instantly acquires normative significance. Barth here finds no gap in the transition from facts to values, or, more specifically, from the description to the desirability of the event of vocation. For him, union with Christ is a desirable goal for human vocation, as the Christ is the true Subject and the Christian is subject to Him in a perfect fellowship. As we saw above, Barth emphasised the indissoluble differentiation and irreversible order of the relationship between Christ and the Christian.¹³⁰ On the one hand, Christ finds the Christian as one who belongs to Him, and He takes possession of her. Thus, the life of Christ in the Christian does not mean He surrenders or loses Himself in her but exercises His supreme sovereignty over her. By attaching the Christian to himself, Christ exercises His liberating power on her so that she may arise and stand with Him. By using this power, He illuminates her and enlightens her eyes so that she can recognise Him in her own freedom. On the other hand, when the Christian is subject to the power of Christ and thus places himself at Christ's disposal, he avails himself of his most proper freedom. Because it does not mean that his own being is crushed or trampled, as Barth expounds, it rather consists in "the opening of his eyes, in the acquiring of the courage, exalted by Kant as the essence of true enlightenment, to use his own understanding, in finding himself placed on his own feet and set in motion on his own path. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty' (2 Cor. 3: 17)."¹³¹ In other words, the subjection of the Christian to Christ is the true path to liberation and responsibility.¹³² Moreover, when the liberation of the Christian takes place, she is immediately drawn out of solitude into fellowship. In this way, all the glories and miseries of her self-dependence and loneliness now give way to the genuine relationship with Christ and with fellow believers. The status of loneliness has thus been replaced by the status of the Christian. Therefore, as the consequence of the event of vocation, human liberation is the supreme good in the course of their union with Christ. Taking

purely general way. He lives his own life in a fellowship with His life which is not ordered by himself but by Him." Ibid., 535-536.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 594-595.

¹³¹ Ibid., 529, also 538.

¹³² At this crucial point, Barth comments that it is this unique power of Jesus Christ in the perfect fellowship which distinguishes all others: "No compulsion brought to bear upon him, even though it were supernatural and exercised in the name of the supreme God, could awaken him to faith rooted in that free recognition and therefore set him in attachment to the One who is light and not darkness, to the living Jesus Christ." Ibid., 529.

both divine and human perspectives, Barth provides a comprehensive account that justifies the desirability of the purpose of vocation. In short, he argues that in perfect fellowship the liberating power of Jesus Christ acts upon human agents and they are thus liberated. The concept of liberty (and freedom) in this sense is far from humans' own possession or privilege; it is the unceasing and gracious gift from Christ which binds them with Him and their neighbours. In the course of liberation, the power of Christ opens two dimensions of fellowship, which need to be appropriately formed and nurtured in mutual responsibility. For Barth, this is true liberation.¹³³

Suppose we agree with Barth that this goal of vocation is admirable and desirable, i.e., it is the supreme good worth pursuing in the Christian life. We still need to know whether it is achievable or even accessible. A persuasive account of vocation must not stop at the point of desirability; it must also provide an illustration and justification of its practicability. Here the concrete question Barth considers is this: what kind of human free decision and action is involved in pursuing the goal of vocation, that is, union with Christ? He suggests that the primary actions responding to the character and work of Jesus Christ in covenantal fellowship include *faith*, *obedience* and *confession*. They are the concrete actions of responsibility. For Barth, the Christian undertakes these things because she is called by the Spirit. As the liberating power, this call not only requires this of her but also empowers her to do so. Consequently, when she believes in Jesus Christ as Lord, she soberly exercises the freedom given her as the divine gift, since she is now in Christ. When she obeys and confesses Him, she naturally realises her true human possibility as the legitimate partner of the covenant who has been justified and sanctified by Him.¹³⁴ As Barth posits, these actions are neither human fixed states nor

¹³³ The following passage eloquently expounds his original idea and is worth of citing at length: "The embracing concept of vocation describes a history, namely, the history of the Christian in connection with that of Jesus Christ Himself as engaged in His prophetic work. And we are concerned with an element in this history in the personal participation of the Christian in the salvation addressed to the world in Jesus Christ, so that to describe it we have deliberately preferred the dynamic term " liberation " to the more static " freedom." In the course of his vocation there also takes place the fact that personal liberation comes to the Christian as the man called to be a witness of Jesus Christ. And it is as this happens that he stands in freedom at that special place. We must now try to consider this event of his liberation. And in so doing we must remember that in its full and serious sense the word " liberation," like " freedom," does not signify merely a release from some authority or power which illegitimately binds man and dominates him to his own destruction, but also a redemption to responsibility to a very different court which demands his attention and obedience and which has a genuine, valid and saving claim upon him. Liberation is the one movement and history in which there takes place inseparably the transition of man both from a false commitment and to a true, and to that extent both from an old and perishing being and to a new and saving. As the existence of the Christian takes place in this small and imperfect transition, it becomes and is an image and analogy of the great and perfect transition, namely, of the liberation of the world and all men which God has accomplished in Jesus Christ, and the Christian acquires and has his own share in the grace of God addressed to the world and all men, being personally qualified for that which primarily and properly makes him a Christian, for service as a witness of Jesus Christ." Ibid., 663-664.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 544.

possessions; they can be actualised only in the encounter between Jesus Christ the divine command and us. It is useful to clarify that Barth rejects the crediting of these actions to our own moral faculties not because of his “reluctance to dwell on moral disposition, virtues, and character as such,” as Nigel Biggar understands.¹³⁵ It is rather because for him the fulfilment of these actions “can consist only in a continual readiness and willingness to follow His action, to do justice in a continual subjection to His electing and willing and producing.”¹³⁶ Based on this insight, John Webster judges that the ethical action of the Christian life corresponding to a genuine vision of reality in Jesus Christ is not passive acquiescence, but must be seen as a resolute, visible testimony to it.¹³⁷

As the first responsible action, faith for Barth is “simply to accept as right what God does, to do everything and all things on the presupposition that God’s action is accepted as right.”¹³⁸ To have faith is to have confidence “in the kingdom of God in Him, in the uniting of God and man accomplished by Him, in the reconciliation of the world with God actualised by Him, in the fatherhood of God and the sonship of man proclaimed by Him.”¹³⁹ As the source of the Christian attitude, the act of faith is the most inward and central and decisive act of a person’s heart. It means that she, in her own decision, is letting Jesus Christ continually lead her and is always moving towards Him. In addition to faith, the responsible actions of the Christian also involve self-determination in conformity to the command of God. This is the action of obedience. For Barth, Jesus Christ demands faith in the form of obedience; obedience to Himself.¹⁴⁰ Like the action of faith, in a Christian’s self-determination, he is eventually led by the Spirit to Jesus Christ, and goes forward with Him. Finally, Barth sees confession or prayer as “the normal action corresponding to the fulfilment of the covenant in Jesus Christ,”¹⁴¹ and is thus the central element of obedience. For him, prayer is the most intimate and effective form of Christian action. When the Christian acts faithfully and obediently, what else can she do but that which she does in prayer?¹⁴² As Eberhard Jüngel interprets, “in the invocation of God, which is commanded by the God whose being is a ‘being in act’, the individual is raised to a life in act which corresponds to God.”¹⁴³ For the Christian community, Barth stresses that prayer

¹³⁵ Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening that Waits: Karl Barth’s Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 131.

¹³⁶ Barth, *CD* IV.2, 802.

¹³⁷ John Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology*, 120.

¹³⁸ Barth, *CD* II.2, 583.

¹³⁹ Barth, *CD* III.3, 248.

¹⁴⁰ Barth, *CD* IV.2, 537. It is worth noting that here Barth embraces Bonhoeffer’s conception of obedience and sees his own account as the expanded version of the latter.

¹⁴¹ Barth, *CD* IV.4, 43.

¹⁴² Barth, *CD* III.3, 264.

¹⁴³ Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy*, trans. Garrett E. Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 321.

is among the church's highest responsibilities and privileges, even from a political standpoint: "Prayer will not lead us away from political thought and action of a modest but definite kind, but will rather lead us directly into conflict where we are conscious of our goal."¹⁴⁴ Agreeing with the priority of prayer over any other ethical action in the social and political arenas, George Hunsinger comments that, prayer does not mean shoving on God what we are unwilling to tackle ourselves, but relying wholly on an ethic of witness and faithfulness that resists all anxieties about influence. Influence will be sought and welcomed should it come, but witness and faithfulness will be the overriding goal.¹⁴⁵

Now let us examine the second answer given by Barth regarding the purpose and meaning of our vocation. As we have seen, through the relational lens, it is appropriate to say that the goal of vocation is union with Christ. This implies, from the very first, a specific situation and position in which human agents are placed, a definite character which they are given, a specific function which is committed to them, and a definite action which they are commissioned to perform.¹⁴⁶ In this light, the relational perspective alone cannot address the whole meaning of vocation. We need a logical move to *functional* consideration. The guiding question here is: what is the structure and function of the Christian life? We ask concerning the structure of the Christian life as it is determined by the Christian's attachment to Jesus Christ, as it reflects this attachment, and as it is controlled by a definite principle.¹⁴⁷ After a lengthy review of the biblical stories of calling, Barth finds that what is common to them is that to be called means being given a task, and that the essence of these tasks is being *witnesses* for God.

In the biblical narratives those called by God are men who are summoned, commanded and empowered to declare this message. They are responsible for addressing the message of God to His creatures. As witnesses they have to repeat what God Himself has first said to them. This is the task laid upon them in their calling and to be discharged with their whole existence. This is the point of their particular existence. This makes them what they are in distinction from all others. Whatever else they may be, and especially their being, capacity and possession graciously granted as their particular experience of salvation, the ethos especially required of them, and all that they might have to undergo in the way of particular suffering--all this depends upon

¹⁴⁴ Karl Barth, *A Letter to Great Britain from Switzerland* (London: Sheldon Press, 1941), 51.

¹⁴⁵ George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 88.

¹⁴⁶ Barth, *CD* IV.3, 533.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 556.

and stands under the common sign of the fact that they are entrusted with this declaration and message and have to discharge this commission. They are witnesses. They are *Verbi divini ministri*. Hence they are called the prophets of Yahweh in the Old Testament and the disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ in the New.¹⁴⁸

Drawing on these biblical stories, Barth indicates that a proper understanding of God's calling (and the corresponding Christian task) from a functional perspective is to see it as "witness". This consists of three key facts as the event of vocation. First, in His calling God not only gives humans knowledge regarding His will and deeds, he also summons and equips them to proclaim this message, to make it heard by all men and women. In other words, the divine Word of God, and Him only, is the origin of the Christian witness. Second, the proclamation is a matter of God on the one side and the world on the other. Therefore, while it is God himself who enlightens, summons and equips humans as His messengers, the very content of their witness, namely, the Gospel itself, is not for their private business and benefit. It by nature is public. It must be a message directed and spoken to His creation, to the world, to humanity.¹⁴⁹ Last but not least, for those who are called, vocation means a certain way of life dedicated to the execution of this task. Once they hear the divine call and acquire it, everything that they will and have and do must take second place and be subordinated to it. Now their being is solely determined by their willingness to undertake the task. Being witnesses for Christ has become the new centre of their identity and existence. In other words, this is their *raison d'être*. Regarding the meaning and significance (for a Christian herself) of being Christ's witness, Barth reflects,

It is here that we catch a glimpse of the fact that their vocation does actually include their personal blessing, experience and endowment as something secondary and accessory, which certainly will not pass them by, but which remains linked with the primary and proper element in their status and can have its own power and constancy

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 576.

¹⁴⁹ As Barth posits, "...we return to our main thesis that the Christian is a witness, a witness of the living Jesus Christ as the Word of God and therefore a witness to the whole world and to all men of the divine act of grace which has taken place for all men. Thus in what makes him a Christian the first concern is not with his own person. He is referred, not to himself, but to God who points him to his neighbour, and to his neighbour who points him to God. He does not look into himself, but in the most pregnant sense outwards, i.e., to the fact that Jesus lives, rules and conquers, and to all that this fact includes. In the measure that he is engrossed in himself, rotating about himself and seeking to assert and develop himself, he alienates himself from what makes him a Christian. And in the same measure he curiously hazards and forfeits the very thing which does in fact personally accrue to him as a Christian, as a witness referred to God and his neighbour." Ibid., 652.

only in this relationship. The true substance of their standing, that which distinguishes them decisively from others as the called, consists absolutely in their existence in execution of the task which God has laid upon them. This makes them what they are. Their personal being, possession and capacity, the honour, joy, assistance, comfort and encouragement, the whole exaltation which they themselves enjoy as this task is given them and they can and should execute it, all these constitute the indispensable periphery which is not actually withheld from them. But the task is the centre of their existence.¹⁵⁰

Given these crucial facts in the process of human vocation, Barth concludes convincingly and profoundly that its goal must be human witness for Christ as a natural consequence of union with Christ. The emphasis here is moving from a relational perspective to a functional one. In vocation, our normative role in a responsible relationship needs to be actualised by responsible actions.

Regarding the normative justification of human witness for Christ, Barth further investigates the principle which controls both the structure of Christian (individual) existence and the community around a Christian's responsible actions. He notices that when referring to the status of the called, Scripture always speaks of their sending and commissioning and, by doing this, sets them in a priestlike role, to be exercised between God and others. For Barth this particular act of God, as portrayed in the biblical narratives, contains a normative principle: in Christian witness, the priority is on God and on one's fellow believers (rather than on oneself). He describes this through the concept of *supreme objectivity*:

[T]he principle which controls the structure of his existence as one who is called is that God on the one side and the world and his fellows on the other have become more important to him, and indeed qualitatively more important, than he can be to himself: God who discloses Himself to him in His work and gives him his corresponding task in relation to the world; and the world to which he is bound and committed as he knows the divine work and has to discharge the task which God has given him in relation to it.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 574-575.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 592.

For him, the paradigmatic figures called by God in the Old and New Testaments are in fact “witnesses” in the twofold sense: these individuals have seen and heard His acts, and they have been called to the work of faithful declaration. To complete their mission, they must learn to forsake themselves and set their primary concern on God, who points them to their neighbours, and to their neighbours, who point them to God. In other words, they must refer to God and their neighbours. For this is the only way to realise their function, and when they perform, they truly stand under the command of love God and their neighbours. Now their regard is no longer self-love, even the finest and highest, but first and foremost the principle which controls them.

Wherever it may lead, their starting-point can only be the will and work of God, and their goal the world. The man in whom Christ lives, and who lives in Christ, has no option but to confirm in His action the living relationship in which God and the world are held together in the work of Christ, the self-determination of all men for God... These together and in their totality, identical with the person and work of Jesus Christ, are called in the New Testament *the kingdom of God*, the gracious and saving establishment of the lordship of the holy, merciful and almighty God in His creation.¹⁵²

This kingdom alone must be the normative principle which controls the structure of the Christian’s existence.

To be sure, for an individual Christian, performing this ordained function as a witness of God does not mean loss, sacrifice or even misfortune, in any sense. Just the opposite. It first and foremost means her own salvation. In the course of proclaiming the kingdom of God, she realises the fact that Jesus Christ has given Himself to live in her, and it is now her responsibility to give herself to live in Christ. This cause of Christ concerning the relation of God to the world and the world to God shapes her existence as a Christian. It naturally takes precedence in her life over all other concerns, aspirations or endeavours. Caught up in the cause of Christ, she can assure that all these things, both great and small, will be added to her. Alternatively, and more boldly, in Barth’s quote of Paul’s famous phrase, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8: 28).¹⁵³ Therefore, as a witness, she may put aside all concern for herself, and treating it as incidental and secondary, even disposable, because it is God Himself who cares about her as His partner in the covenant. In addition to personal salvation, when her main concern is with her function

¹⁵² Ibid., 598-599, Italics added.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 593.

as a witness, it will also bring her personal liberation in many aspects. In this regard, Barth offers a list of benefits which, though not exhaustive, is quite helpful. First, it means the Christian's deliverance, from the confusion of the unlimited possibilities of her life choices, to the firm ground of the calling of God. Her existence is thus saved from indecision, destruction or disintegration. Now she is set into action and given a certain horizon and shape.¹⁵⁴ In Barth's metaphor, she is "borne as with eagles' wings above the abyss."¹⁵⁵ Second and correspondingly, she is liberated from desire, demand and anxiety – freed to pray. As a witness of Jesus Christ, she is a model to those around her, born again to be a pure and grateful recipient.¹⁵⁶ Third, her liberation means a transition from the forcible dominion of things to the free territory of the human. This is because God in Jesus has become a human and served humans, not things, even those most important or splendid. Similarly, it is for the sake of humanity and not for any institution, idea, enterprise or other kinds of things that this Christian is called to be a witness.¹⁵⁷ Finally and most importantly, she is delivered from the dialectic of the moral and the immoral, to the symbiosis of forgiveness and gratitude. Since witness is centred on the act of God – His victory over sin and over the hostility between God and human – this Christian may move forward from moral judgement as her own willingness and responsibility to participate in the act of the Victor, which is essentially good. On the basis of the forgiveness which has already come to her, she can finally leave her morality and immorality to trust in the revealed goodness of God in Jesus Christ. In gratitude, her action becomes good, an action of obedience.¹⁵⁸ From these moral and practical standpoints, we can indeed say that the vocation of the Christian is her wholly personal liberation.

Despite the normative justification of human witness for Christ, there is also a need to make sense of it from a practical point of view. Here the useful concept is *service* or *ministry*, which is adopted by Barth to summarise the whole of responsible Christian action. As he understands, the term is illuminating because it indicates both the action of the Christian who is called, and the preceding action of Jesus Christ who calls her. This draws our attention to what is common to the life of both and, more importantly, explains the necessity for the action

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 665-666.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 669.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 667.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 666.

¹⁵⁸ It is good and obedient in the fact that it is done in the light of the merciful act of God accomplished and also revealed in Jesus Christ, in the fact that it thus reflects and represents the occurrence which the Christian has to attest to the world both good and bad as its only salvation. In the transition from that false to this true dialectic the Christian may live. Ibid., 670-671.

of the Christian to follow that of Christ.¹⁵⁹ In other words, the concept implies an imperative for the Christian as a responsible witness:

In all circumstances and with his whole existence he is a responsible witness of the Word of God. He is called to be this. As such he is set at the side of God in the world, and therefore set over against the world. As such he is bound both to God and men. He exists in this engagement, but he is also invested with the honour which it implies to be bound in this function. It is in this way that he and his service, his very existence, are the appointed sign of the living Word of God and therefore of its substance, of the kingdom of God drawn near in all its concealment in the person and act of the One who alone can and does reveal it.¹⁶⁰

In her doing of service, she first hears the Word of God in Jesus Christ, then is commissioned by Him, and finally turns to the world – those who have not yet heard this Word – and makes them able to hear. When she determines to do this, she will necessarily encounter two kinds of risks, namely, her own limitations and the world's opposition. On the one hand, she can serve only as a sinful human. Disrupted and burdened by the sinfulness of her human existence, her ministry can be only a human indication and attestation of Jesus Christ as the Word of God. She can never pretend to be Christ Himself or even a peer of Christ.¹⁶¹ She must be aware of this moral risk in the course of her witness. On the other hand, her service will bring her pain and harm: Jesus Christ leads her into this tension as her witness collides with the world, as she exposes herself to this collision, and as she suffers and perseveres. Barth argues convincingly that it is Christ Himself who leaves the Christian no other option than to accept this mortal risk of witness.¹⁶²

Given these internal restrictions and external confrontations, how can we possibly imagine the success of human vocation? For Barth, it does not depend upon strength, strategies or

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 600-601.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 609-610.

¹⁶¹ Barth uses the metaphor of the heralds and their king to describe our relationship with Christ: in their own limitations, the very responsibility of the heralds is not to be the king, but simply to follow him and represent him. He explains: "They can only follow Christ. He alone is always the Lord, the authentic, original, immediate and direct Speaker of the Word of God-He who is also alone the Doer of His work. It can and will be enough for them to be like Him, to copy or repeat His revealing and proclaiming, to approximate to Him as His representatives. The herald is not the king. He summons them, however, to be His heralds. He calls them-and it is in this sense that we may really speak of their co-operation in His prophetic work-to the *ministerium Verbi divini*, to the service of God and His Word. This then, the divine Word, the Word of Christ, is the telos and meaning of their service." Ibid. 606-607.

¹⁶² Ibid., 634.

politics, but is held entirely in the hands of Jesus Christ who has overcome evil and won for himself the world and humanity. We are thus relieved from human anxiety about influence, whether good or bad, worthy or unworthy, fruitful or harmful. As a result, our primary and constant concern is no longer the consequence of our attestation, but our wholehearted attestation itself, using our own inner and outer life in all circumstances. Ultimately, the very form and shape of our own life is the way to fulfil our vocation in Jesus Christ, the One who works His life-changing power upon us and transforms us into His responsible witnesses:

He must accept the fact that the success of his witness is not in his own hands but in the hands of the One whom he has to serve in it. Yet the fact remains that it can be accepted or even understood only to the extent that he himself has accepted as well as understood what he attests, that he can attest it in his own faith, knowledge and experience as one who has himself been overcome, subdued and determined by it, so that it has taken and continually takes form in his inner and outer life. He cannot, then, be satisfied merely to confess the act and revelation of God as objective truth, and to declare them as such in his speech and conduct. He should naturally do this. But he must show that they are objective truth by attesting them as one in whose subjectivity they prove their superiority and in whose humanity they find a reflection and impress.¹⁶³

In summary, as the whole organisation of a responsible way of life, human being's action of responsibility is their vocation in Jesus Christ. As *the* historical and *the* spiritual event of their whole lives and particular moments it comes true because of their justification and sanctification, which has already been accomplished by the work of Jesus Christ, who alone is the divine grace of God. In His person and action, God's eternal election is revealed and acted upon for all, in accordance with His gracious covenant with them. This is the prevailing reality which precedes and determines their vocation. There is only one Centre and one Subject of reality, who alone is responsible for its completion and perfection. He alone is the source of human responsibility. He once and for all opened a new horizon for humans, that is, their vocation as their illumination in Him. Thus, their whole lives – attitudes, decisions and actions – acquire their meaning and purpose on the basis of this new reality. A faithful and precise description of this reality and their role in it is the primary task of Barth's doctrine of vocation.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 656-657.

In brief, it is the dynamic, concrete and holistic event of man or woman addressed by the Objective Subject Jesus Christ in the perfect fellowship in which he or she is empowered and committed to witness the liberating power of Jesus Christ in His Spirit. Since Jesus Christ has enlightened them with the knowledge of Himself and their own selves, human agents now can confidently go beyond their own earthly life and reflect their life and action at the level of responsibility; that is, their concerns can focus on the relation and function of their whole being with Christ. Therefore, as Barth cautions, the conventional concepts we employ to describe and assess a particular action must be reformulated. In this light, he suggests two dimensions. human vocation, first and foremost, means union with Christ. As a relational event, it has a firm basis in the perfect order and structure of the covenantal relationship between Jesus Christ and human beings. Its fulfilment is in the process of responsible actions from faith to obedience to confession. In addition, human vocation also means witness for Christ. As a functional event, this task has been justified by the supreme objectivity of the kingdom of God which has brought liberation for the world and for humanity. Individual Christians can serve God and their neighbours by attesting and proclaiming the deeds of Christ in all circumstances, especially in affliction. In the course of overcoming all kinds of moral and mortal risks, human agents may finally realise that the truth of their vocation is nothing but His union with them and His creation of a new humanity in their life-long witness.

4.3 The action of responsibility in Mou Zongsan's ethics of extending knowledge

Situated in a different tradition, Mou Zongsan naturally has an understanding and interpretation of the action of responsibility distinct from that of Barth. For Mou, the central idea which expresses the organisation of our responsible way of life and a particular action is self-cultivation practices (*gongfu*, 工夫). In his terminology of moral metaphysics, the term denotes various human efforts and techniques aiming at the formation of habitus and their subsequent transformation. Broadly understood, self-cultivation points both to moral exercise and to moral experience, covering our consciousness, intentionality and willpower.¹⁶⁴ We have seen in Chapter 3 that Mou regards the innate knowledge of good as the definite source of responsibility. It is this innate knowledge of good which prevails throughout the whole universe as the creative

¹⁶⁴ Sébastien Billioud, *Thinking through Confucian Modernity: A Study of Mou Zongsan's Moral Metaphysics* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 199-200.

principle and meanwhile inhabits the inmost being of every person as her moral consciousness. Moreover, the practical approach for human agents to reach this universe's ultimate reality is intellectual intuition, which operates as the vital part of their autonomy. At the conceptual level, these notions are used by Mou to articulate such a reality in dialogue with Western philosophies, especially that of Kant.¹⁶⁵ In practice, however, the cornerstone of his philosophical speculations and argumentation is self-cultivation. Like his peers in the New Confucian school, Mou never relegates self-cultivation to a marginal role or treats it as less significant to moral formation than intellectual discourse. On the contrary, self-cultivation for him is the essential praxis of sainthood and is thus central to all schools of Confucianism. To a large degree, the possibility of sainthood as the genuine being of responsibility is always linked fundamentally to the practice of self-cultivation. Given the significance of self-cultivation for the Confucian tradition and Mou's own project, it is understandable that his moral metaphysics must also be rooted in and nurtured by the same praxis. In other words, the concept of self-cultivation is the crucial responsible action in the Confucian moral account of Mou Zongsan.

It is critical to notice that, in parallel to Barth's perception of his account of vocation, Mou sees his understanding of the meaning and significance of self-cultivation not as a personal invention, but as a faithful reading of the moral tradition of the inner sainthood, drawn from his prominent forerunners Mencius and Wang Yangming. For Mou, it was Mencius who first opened the moral horizons of inner sainthood for Confucianism.¹⁶⁶ The overarching lessons of Mencius are indeed centred on the innate goodness of human nature. When he taught about the four sprouts of cardinal virtues (*siduan*, 四端) and more generally of morality, he emphasised that the existence of our *proper nature* (*benxin*, 本心) is not defined by external virtues such as righteousness or benevolence; its spontaneous activity is the origin of all virtues.¹⁶⁷ In other words, all these moral sprouts can be seen as the various shoots of the same plant. As Mou discerns, the proper nature in this sense is hardly a psychosocial object; it is better understood as an ontological subject. He thus interprets this proper nature as a kind of *ontological feeling*

¹⁶⁵ For Mou, it is the practice of self-cultivation rather than philosophical speculations and discourses distinguishes Eastern philosophy from the West: "Western philosophy is seen simply as philosophy. It stresses the analysis of theory but attaches no importance to the practical cultivation of virtue. *Gongfu* refer to 'practice.' Here is where Western philosophy does not talk about practice, whereas Eastern philosophy is quite different. Why do we talk about such things as mind-substance, nature-substance, and transcendental Dao (*daoti*, 道体)? All of it is theory! We talk about them because we have self-cultivation, and it is within effort and practice that we understand these truths." Mou Zongsan, *NL*, 423, slightly changed in the quote.

¹⁶⁶ For the ethical instructions of Mencius and the other key figures of the school of inner sainthood, see Lee Ming-huei, *Confucianism and Kant* (Taipei: Linking Publishing, 1990).

¹⁶⁷ See Gong Sun Chou I, Mencius, in James Legge, *The Chinese Classics: With A Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, Copious Indexes* (Hong Kong: The Hong Kong University Press, 1960).

(*bentilun de jueqing*, 本体论的觉情) which alone activates the four sprouts.¹⁶⁸ Concerning the realisation of this proper nature, Mencius further indicated that “They are not men of distinguished talents and virtue only who have this mental nature. All men have it; what belongs to such men is simply that they do not lose it.”¹⁶⁹ The distinction between two types of people, namely between the ordinary and the talented/virtuous, is of particular importance for Mou because it hints that the character of sainthood is not naturally superior. To be virtuous, one must embrace her proper nature as an innate quality and make an effort to keep it. In other words, self-cultivation involves tasks of development and maintenance. At both crucial points, Mencius is Mou Zongsan’s exemplary predecessor and source of inspiration.

Another central figure of the inner-sainthood school with substantial influence on Mou Zongsan is Wang Yangming. His doctrine of the innate knowledge of good was a creative development from Mencius’ conception of proper nature. For Wang, Mencius provided an essential clue for the innate knowledge of good when he said, “The ability possessed by men without it having been acquired by learning is intuitive ability (*liangneng*, 良能), and the knowledge they possess without the exercise of thought is intuitive knowledge (*liangzhi*, 良知).”¹⁷⁰ Filial affection for parents and respect for elders are the classic expressions of this. Based on this insight, Wang insisted that our innate knowledge of good is nothing but our proper nature, which instinctively upholds virtues and opposes vices. The innate knowledge here is not a kind of acquired human cognitive capacity but an instinctual capacity with ethical and emotional aspects.¹⁷¹ Moreover, it itself is the only source of human wills and actions and feelings as moral agents. Therefore, it is appropriate to synthesise the four sprouts or shoots as the representations of the innate knowledge of good. As Wang summarised in his *Instructions for Practical Living*, “Innate knowledge is nothing but the sense of right and wrong, and the sense of right and wrong is nothing but to love [the right] and to hate [the wrong]. To love [the right] and to hate [the wrong] cover all senses of right and wrong and the sense of right and wrong covers all affairs and their variations.”¹⁷² However, different from Mencius, Wang did not see moral sprouts as indications of what one could become, given that she develops and nurtures them; they are clues of what already is. As Philip J. Ivanhoe explains, for Wang our

¹⁶⁸ Mou Zongsan, *MS I*, 277.

¹⁶⁹ See Gaozi I, Mencius.

¹⁷⁰ Jin Xin I, Mencius.

¹⁷¹ Peng Guoxiang, *The Unfolding of the Learning of Innate Knowledge of the Good: Wang Ji and Wang Yang-ming’s Teaching in the mid-late Ming* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2015), 22.

¹⁷² Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 228.

spontaneous moral actions “are not fragile moral sprouts that need to be nurtured and cultivated; they are the tips of a massive moral iceberg: the visible manifestations of a fully-formed moral disposition that lies hidden below a sea of selfishness.”¹⁷³ In this way, Wang dramatically shifted the practical orientation in the issue of self-cultivation. For him, our primary focus is not on how to grow sprouts but on how to unveil the already fully formed moral nature. Historically, such practical transformation can be seen as an outcome of Wang’s extensive dialogues with contemporary thinkers from Daoism and Buddhism. As Chan Wing-tsit and others illustrate, these two schools of Chinese thought had a profound impact on Wang’s refined Confucianism for they inspired him to explore formal characteristics of the innate knowledge and pushed him to elaborate possible ways of self-cultivation corresponding to them.¹⁷⁴ Following in this vein, Mou Zongsan differentiates the major types of self-cultivation since Mencius and further identifies the most promising approach to sainthood.

The two principal ways of self-cultivation, for Mou Zongsan, are retrospective verification and outward-oriented approaches (*shunqu zhilu*, 顺取之路).¹⁷⁵ Mou regards himself as the adherent of the former and argues for it as Confucian orthodoxy. He makes this point explicitly:

When it comes to highlighting [the meaning of] inner sainthood, retrospective verification is truly fundamental, unlike the outward-oriented approaches of self-cultivation, which [aim at] investigating things in order to exhaust their principle (*gewu qiongli*, 格物穷理). Consequently, the practice that focuses on retrospective verification reaches the essential. This naturally does not mean that knowledge, in our concrete life, is not necessary.¹⁷⁶

The idea which Mou rejects here is that self-cultivation is primarily a cognitive activity of knowing, i.e., that it is sufficient to target all one’s exercises to the principles which are external to the self and then seek moral guidance from them. Historically, this was the pivotal moral

¹⁷³ Philip Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mengzi and Wang Yangming* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 80. Ivanhoe built upon the difference between Mencius and Wang Yangming to develop a distinction between two ideal-types of sainthood: the fully developed sage and the fully discovered sage.

¹⁷⁴ See, for example, Chan Wing-tsit, *Wang Yangming and Chan* (Taipei: Student Publishing, 1984); Liu Ts’un-yan, *The Collected Works of Gentle Breeze Hall* (Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1991); Peng, *The Unfolding of the Learning of Innate Knowledge of the Good*, Chapter 7; and Chen, Lisheng, *The Key to Sainthood: A Study of Wang Yangming’s teaching of Extending Knowledge* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2019), Chapter 13.

¹⁷⁵ Mou, *MS I*, 45-64; *NL*, 395-403. Mou’s student Lin Yuehui provides an updated and nuanced investigation of the theme based on Mou’s typology. See Lin Yuehui, *Hermeneutics and Self-Cultivation: The Transcendental Orientation and the Immanent Dialectics of the Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism* (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2008).

¹⁷⁶ Mou, *MS I*, 337. The English translation is quoted from Billioud, *Thinking through Confucian Modernity*, 198.

teaching of the Cheng-Zhu school, which promoted the investigation of things in order to exhaust principles. Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200), for instance, maintained that this particular way of self-cultivation was an inheritance from the *Great Learning* (*daxue*, 《大学》). The investigation of things here refers to the attention paid to natural and human affairs so that one can identify the patterns which structure them. Wang Yangming, however, contended that this approach is profoundly misleading because it confuses the objects of knowledge and morality. For him, the latter is not a thing “out there” awaiting our investigation; it itself is rather our genuine humanity, and all of our moral wills and actions are nothing but its functions. The retrospective movement is the intentional practice assigned to reveal this proper nature. In the terminology of Mou Zongsan, it is thus defined as an intellectual intuition that manifests the very foundation of our humanity.¹⁷⁷ When the innate knowledge of good emerges, even if occasionally, it manifests itself as a pure and perfect mind-substance and is able to reflect the necessity of the situation.¹⁷⁸ As a way of self-cultivation, retrospective verification allows human agents to experience their proper nature without distraction or distortion. In other words, it is the appropriate action to respond to their innate knowledge of good. For this reason, Mou judges that while the Cheng-Zhu school had prevailed in Confucianism since the Song and Ming Dynasties, it was Lu Xiangshan (陆象山, 1139-93), Wang Yangming, Liu Jishan (刘蕺山, 1578-1645) and the other advocates of retrospective verification who truly represented orthodoxy.¹⁷⁹ In his eyes, such a distinction is not only necessary but doctrinal, even at the risk of over-simplification. Only in this way can both the fundamental insights of these Confucian nobles be inherited uncompromisingly, and the responsible action of sainthood be formulated unambiguously.

Building on the interpretive tradition of Wang Yangming, Mou Zongsan develops a nascent version of retrospective verification. For him, in addition to an accurate description, a comprehensive account of this activity also requires normative and practical justifications. The first crucial question is about the desirability of retrospective verification: In what sense can we say that retrospective verification is a desirable way to experience the innate knowledge of good?

¹⁷⁷ Billioud, *Thinking through Confucian Modernity*, 206.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 202-203.

¹⁷⁹ Mou compliments that “Self-cultivation practices evoked by these few scholars correspond to what is termed “the way of retrospective verification”. They understood very well that the notion of nijue is the most essential one to discuss moral practice or gongfu. Thereby, they considered morality for what it is and not as an object of knowledge.” Mou, *MS I*, 375, 438. From the perspective of intellectual history, it is also worth of noting that, the teachings of inner sainthood were not only inherited from Mencius, but also developed and earned its mature form through constant dialogue with Zhu Xi. Chen Lai, *The Realms of Being and Non-Being: The Spirit of Wang Yangming's Philosophy* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2013), 166-178; Wm T. de Bary, *The Message of the Mind in Neo-Confucianism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 79-87.

Behind that, what factors determine the genuine practice of self-cultivation? Inspired by Wang Yangming, Mou believes that the answer lies in the character of the innate knowledge of good. The key text in this respect is Wang's response to his disciple Nie Wenwei (聂文蔚, 1487-1563) concerning the practical issues in the extension of innate knowledge (*zhi liangzhi*, 致良知),

Innate knowledge is nothing other than the Principle of Nature where the natural clear consciousness reveals itself. Its original substance is merely true sincerity and commiseration. Therefore, when the true sincerity and commiseration of this innate knowledge is extended to serve one's parents, it becomes filial piety. When the true sincerity and commiseration of this innate knowledge is extended to obey one's elder brother, it becomes brotherly respect. And when the true sincerity and commiseration of this innate knowledge is extended to serve one's ruler, it becomes loyalty. There is but one innate knowledge, one true sincerity and commiseration... There is only one innate knowledge. In its manifestation and universal operation, it is then and there self-sufficient. It comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. It depends on nothing. However, in its manifestation and universal operation, there are degrees of importance and intensity to and from which not the slightest amount can be added or subtracted.¹⁸⁰

As Mou interprets, here Wang used sincerity and commiseration to demonstrate innate knowledge. In particular, commiseration is the human sense of benevolence, and sincerity is the human sense of respect; innate knowledge is the combination of the two. In different situations, it spontaneously manifests various Principles of Nature such as filial piety, brotherly respect and political loyalty. None of these principles is external to human agents – all are natural and clear representations of their innate knowledge.¹⁸¹ That is to say, when a human agent practice these virtues, especially when she strive to exhaust the principle, she participates eventually in the extension of her innate knowledge of good. As the subject of her moral wills and actions, her innate knowledge of good is self-sufficient. It cannot be separated from the Principle of Nature. A proper understanding of their relationship, as Mou indicates, is that the

¹⁸⁰ Wang, *Instructions for Practical Living*, 176-177. In another letter replying to his disciple Gu Dongqiao (顾东桥), Wang expressed the same points of view: "What I mean by the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge is to extend the innate knowledge of my mind to each and every thing. The innate knowledge of my mind is the same as the Principle of Nature. When the Principle of Nature in the innate knowledge of my mind is extended to all things, all things will attain their principle. To extend the innate knowledge of my mind is the matter of the extension of knowledge, and for all things to attain their principle is the matter of the investigation of things. In these the mind and principle are combined into one." Ibid., 99.

¹⁸¹ Mou, *MS I*, 179.

Principle of Nature is the objective manifestation of innate knowledge; and innate knowledge is the subjective presentation of the Principle of Nature. Therefore, it can be said that innate knowledge is the being in action which always actualises its transcendent and universal substance dynamically and concretely.¹⁸² Since the purpose of retrospective verification is to manifest nothing but one's innate knowledge of good, it thus becomes a synonym of the extension of innate knowledge and must be the humble but suitable way of self-cultivation. The two terms simply express two distinct positions taken by the two thinkers when they explain the same activity: Wang takes the point of one's innate knowledge of good which aims to extend itself to the utmost, while Mou speaks of one's moral agency to reach her most authentic self.

It is useful to add that the supreme character of the innate knowledge of good guarantees that it can become adequate guidance and the most powerful motive for one's spontaneous moral actions, especially when she struggles with the evil in her. This can be seen as additional evidence for the superiority of retrospective verification. As Mou acknowledges, while every man and woman has the innate knowledge of good, only a few can become saints, due to their wicked thoughts and desires. In this regard, their egoism, selfish desires and interests, and other subjective dispositions all play a negative role in moral formation. They obstruct or conceal the natural movement of the innate knowledge of good.¹⁸³ One possible solution, in the Confucian tradition, is to appeal to external principles independent of the proper nature. In Mou's view, the motto of the Cheng-Zhu school – “the key to personal cultivation lies in holding fast to earnestness or conscientiousness whereas the key to the advancement of learning lies in extending knowledge” – is the most advanced form of such an onward-oriented approach. Several fundamental notions of Zhu Xi, such as conscientiousness (*jujing*, 居敬), nourishing of the self-nature (*hanyang*, 涵养), investigation of things and exhausting the principle, all point in the same direction of moral exercises.¹⁸⁴ These practices of self-cultivation, in their best sense, are only supplementary techniques, rather than the principal one. For when detached from the innate knowledge of good, the so-called Principle of Nature will inevitably become abstract and distant to the self and thus lack any concrete way to enforce itself. For this reason, Mou argues that resorting to external authority, no matter how admirable, is a trick which is neither smart nor wise. The key to all solutions is always the innate knowledge of good, the arch nemesis of

¹⁸² Ibid., 181.

¹⁸³ Mou, Ibid., 189-190.

¹⁸⁴ A comprehensive analysis of Zhu Xi's key notions of self-cultivation is Chen Lai, *A Study of Zhu Xi's Philosophy* (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2000), Chapter 12-14. See also Liu Shu-hsien, *Development and Completion of Zhu Xi's Philosophy* (Taipei: Student Publishing, 1984). For the political and cultural engagement of Zhu Xi and its influence on his Confucian ethics, see Yu Ying-shih, *The Historical World of Zhu Xi: A Study of the Political Culture of Song Intellectuals* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2011).

our wicked wills and actions. When its genuine power is recognised and confirmed, we can rely on and take advantage of this ultimate source of goodness.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, given the usefulness of the outward-oriented approach, it must be counted as a minor approach, not to be confused with the major one. Furthermore, against the charge that since Mencius there has been a naïve tendency which holds an over-optimistic view of human nature and overlooks its dark side, for Mou and the other practitioners of the school of inner sainthood, it is the difficulty of overcoming one's own evil that requires retrospective verification to be the principal way of self-cultivation.¹⁸⁶

The exercise of retrospective verification corresponds closely to its purpose. This is the second critical issue of justification. It asks, for example: How can we reach the innate knowledge of good through retrospective movement? What are the specific actions or steps involved in this process? Are they performed separately or collaboratively? How can we describe the process of retrospective verification – is it accumulative, transformative or otherwise? And finally, what is the starting point and the ultimate end of the practice? To address these practical issues adequately, Mou finds it useful to first trace the traditional teachings and identify the guiding principle. In the tradition indebted to the *Great Learning*, there are four celebrated practices of moral cultivation: making one's will sincere (*chengyi*, 诚意), rectifying one's mind (*zhengxin*, 正心), investigating things and extending knowledge (*zhizhi*, 致知). To make sense of retrospective verification, the dynamism of each activity and the interplay among them need to be articulated. This mission, in Mou's reading, has been handled and completed by Wang Yangming. Without Wang's magisterial interpretation, the principal guidance for self-cultivation practices could not be so transparent and tangible.¹⁸⁷ For

¹⁸⁵ This is built upon Wang's incisive argument: "For instance, if one has the will to do good, then he should do it right in the things he happens to be doing. If one has the will to get rid of evil, he should resist evil right in the things he is doing. Getting rid of evil is, of course, to rectify what is incorrect in the mind and return to the original state of correctness. When good is done, evil is corrected. Hence, doing good is also to rectify what is incorrect in the mind and return to the original state of correctness. In this way the innate knowledge of our mind will not be obscured by selfish desires and can then be extended to the utmost, and whenever the will operates, its desire to love good and to get rid of evil will always be sincere." Wang, *Instructions for Practical Living*, 248. See also Mou, *NL*, 423-430.

¹⁸⁶ A noticeable criticism in this respect was made by Chang Hao and Wei Zhengtong. See Chang Hao, *Consciousness of Darkness and the Democratic Tradition* (Beijing: New Star Press, 2006); Wei Zhengtong, *Confucianism and Modern China* (Shanghai: People's Press, 1990). For Mou's clarification of the relevant teachings of inner sainthood, see Mou, *MS*, 671. Lee Ming-huei, one of Mou's later disciples, further defends Mou's position and argues against Chang Hao's thesis. See Lee Ming-huei, *Political Thought from A Confucian Perspective* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005), Chapter 3.

¹⁸⁷ On many occasions, Mou compliments Wang as the most original and coherent interpreter of these ancient notions. He frequently reminds his readers not to ignore Wang's overarching contribution to the whole tradition, especially Wang's stress on the creative and concrete character of our innate knowledge. Mou, *MS I*, 215-216. The

Wang, the cultivation of the personal life involves directing one's wills and actions to love the good and hate the evil. It requires conscientious effort to train mind and body in concrete situations and affairs. Since the mind is the master of the whole body, the priority must thus be laid on rectifying the mind and making the will sincere. But the actual way to achieve this goal is to let one's innate knowledge of good extend to its utmost through the concrete and earnest investigation of things. Therefore, it can be said that one's experience of self-cultivation is nothing but the extension of knowledge. For "knowledge" here does not mean knowing things and principles external to human agents, but precisely the active being of the original substance of their mind. It itself is the way as well as the end. Wang's interpretation thus inverts the traditional sequence of moral practices, namely first making one's will sincere, then rectifying one's mind, followed by the investigation of things and finally the extension of knowledge. Now the last has become the first. The new centre is the extension of knowledge, with everything else dependent on it. This new-fashioned principle is illuminated by the famous doctrine of four maxims (*sijujiao*, 四句教):

In the original substance of the mind there is no distinction of good and evil.

When the will becomes active, however, such distinction exists.

The faculty of innate knowledge is to know good and evil.

The investigation of things is to do good and remove evil.¹⁸⁸

For Mou Zongsan, the above instruction is a valuable guide for us to figure out the dynamism of retrospective verification. The first sentence entails the character of the human moral subject. In particular, one's original substance of mind is the supreme good, without any distinction of good or evil within itself. As a natural and clear consciousness, it is capable of sustaining itself and is thus self-sufficient. It is the ultimate and transcendent reality of one's proper nature. However, when it actualises itself in concrete situations, it becomes one's will, which is prone to obstruction or distortion by selfish desires. Thus, as the second sentence infers, a distinction between good and evil can be made at this empirical level.¹⁸⁹ Fortunately, the performance of one's good and evil wills is still under the supervision of the original substance

teachings appeared in Wang's *Instructions for Practical Living* (247-249) clearly map out the configuration of practical actions. For Mou, a sensible argument for retrospective verification must build on this foundation.

¹⁸⁸ Wang, *Instructions for Practical Living*, 243.

¹⁸⁹ In another occasion, Wang Yangming taught that "The eye has no substance of its own. Its substance consists of the colours of all things." Likewise, "The mind has no substance of its own. Its substance consists of the right or wrong of the influences and responses of Heaven, Earth, and all things." Ibid., 223.

of mind, which is now acting as the innate knowledge of good. It manifests itself concretely in a person's wills and rectifies those wicked ones as a judge. Thus, a solution is promised in the third sentence. The critical point is that a person's innate knowledge manifests itself not in a vacuum, but in concrete and practical affairs. In the process of investigating things, she begins to experience its existence and work in concrete virtuous actions upon particular persons, things or affairs. In this sense, doing good and removing evil (the last sentence) can be seen as the verification of the innate knowledge of good. The general orientation of a person's moral reflection is thus not exterior. From the very outset, it is her innate knowledge of good that operates and actualises itself in her moral wills and actions. It is the fundamental reality, whether she is aware of it or not. But if she indeed renders her innate knowledge of good as relevant and dominant, her moral self will immediately emerge, and her senses (i.e., our eyes, ears, mouth) will naturally become the vector of moral actions. One can thus expect that harmony between her mind and body will be realised, and that a genuine moral agent who is able to respond to a concrete situation will emerge.

Given the fact that Wang has put extraordinary attention on the inner affairs of the moral self, one may suspect whether he is tempted to a version of subjectivism, that is, absorbing everything into oneself and denying the objective status of others. If so, his teaching about retrospective verification would be a morally misleading and irresponsible action. For Mou, this charge can be dismantled if we take a proper reading of the relationship between the *will* (*yi*, 意) and the *thing* (*wu*, 物), as in Wang's formulation. According to Wang, a thing is defined as something to which the will is directed and is usually associated with persons or objects. He gave several illuminating examples:

When the will is directed toward serving one's parents, then serving one's parents is a "thing." When the will is directed toward serving one's ruler, then serving one's ruler is a "thing." When the will is directed toward being humane to all people and feeling love toward things, then being humane to all people and feeling love toward things are "things," and when the will is directed toward seeing, hearing, speaking, and acting, then each of these is a "thing." Therefore I say that there are neither principles nor things outside the mind.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 14.

As Mou reflects, a thing in this sense does not refer to a physical item such as a table, a tree or an atom, and neither does it tend to reduce another fellow human to an object in the same category. It rather means all kinds of concrete actions in our lives, actions which are necessarily determined by our wills. It is our living practice.¹⁹¹ Thus, talking about the relationship between a thing and a will eventually deals with the relationship between our will and action. But different from modern behaviourism, in which human action is always explained in terms of conditioning (i.e., behavioural patterns) without appealing to one's own thoughts or feelings, here Mou takes the route of Wang Yangming and insists that it is our wills that control and direct our actions and not *vice versa*, if we want to make the notion of responsibility intelligible:

For every way of life and every single act, I must take full responsibility. I am fully responsible for it because it has been unified with my will. When my mind is rectified and my will is sincere, my conduct will be corrected, and there will be nothing wrong with it. Nothing is wrong, because it is all nurtured by the Principle of Nature and enforced by the innate knowledge of good on the one hand, and dominated by the supreme principle of the mind (*xinlü*, 心 律) on the other. The supreme principle of the mind is in the mind of Heaven (*tianxin*, 天 心), so there is no principle outside the mind. Moreover, the mind is not vacant – it must be actualised in a variety of life behaviours.¹⁹²

Now it is becoming clear that, from particular actions such as serving one's parents or rulers to general actions like being humane to all people and feeling love toward things, there exists a coherent dynamism of human responsible action. First, it never exists on its own but is intimately connected with the will. Furthermore, as a kind of situated practice, it is solely determined by the will following the innate knowledge of good. Most importantly, what the innate knowledge of good mandates in one's life practice is nothing but serving and loving others. When a human agent investigates things, she is venturing to fulfil her responsibility under this imperative. It is therefore interesting to see that, in contrast to Barth, Mou has good reasons to embrace the notion of *subjective superiority*. For him, to realise the ultimate reality

¹⁹¹ Mou, *LX*, 201.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 202. The term *tianxin* first appears in Mou, *Critique of Cognitive Mind* (Taipei: Student Publishing, 1956), 719-738. It signifies a rightful place for the cosmos and human life to govern and direct them. Sor-hoon Tan, "Contemporary Neo-Confucian Philosophy," in *History of Chinese Philosophy*, ed., Bo Mou (London; New York: Routledge, 2009): 556-557.

of the innate knowledge of good and to be responsible to others, one needs to set her primary concern on her own wills and actions, putting them in the right order.

Moreover, built on the magisterial principle, Mou carefully develops his interpretation and sheds new light on the tradition. As he reasons, the doctrine of four maxims contains a pair of two-fold realities: the *ultimate* reality, revealed in the first and third sentences, where the nature and character of the innate knowledge of good are displayed; and the *empirical* one, referred to in the second and fourth sentences, where the primary target and working mechanism of the innate knowledge of good are demonstrated. The first aspect of reality can also be seen as the form of the innate knowledge of good, with the second aspect as the material. The formal aspect of the innate knowledge of good tells us that it is the originator of our moral wills and actions and meanwhile the examiner of their performance. But whether an originator or examiner, the innate knowledge of good tends to actualise itself as a transcendent, concrete and personal subject.¹⁹³ The material aspect of the innate knowledge of good shows us that it is the substance of the ultimate good which prevails from human life to all the living creatures in Heaven and the Earth. Whenever it operates in human and natural affairs, it always enforces human good wills and actions and undermines their selfish and wicked ones. The task of retrospective verification, correspondingly, is to recognise the innate knowledge of good concerning its form and content, and then determine to follow its guidance. Ontologically speaking, it is derived from the necessity of the innate knowledge itself, and it is directed to human responsible actions toward the others and the world. In this way, Mou has gone beyond his predecessor Wang through providing a metaphysical basis for the practical validity of retrospective verification. This creates enough space for contemporary scholars such as Chen Lai (陈来) to further differentiate the realm of being (you, 有) and the realm of non-being (*wu*, 无) to specify the existential features of the innate knowledge in its material and formal dimensions and link meaningful practices of retrospective verification to them.¹⁹⁴

Once the dynamism and the realms of retrospective verification are clarified, then promising approaches can be found. Following Wang Yangming, Mou Zongsan identifies two major approaches of retrospective verification which correspond to the two-dimensional activities of the innate knowledge of good. The first approach is the *sudden awakening* (*dunwu*, 顿悟). According to him, sudden awakening means that we let ourselves start a sudden rupture or switch to a perfect way for the proper nature to operate; this allows us to reach the formal

¹⁹³ See Chapter 3.

¹⁹⁴ See, for example, Chen, *The Realms of Being and Non-Being*; Peng, *The Unfolding of the Learning of Innate Knowledge of the Good*, 28-29.

aspect of innate knowledge. Such a rupture is described in many traditional Confucian expressions, yet Mou's favourite is "flowing out in an irresistible flood (*peiran mozhi nengyu*, 沛然莫之能御) and "act if it is proper to act (*dangxing zexing*, 当行则行)."¹⁹⁵ Both express the idea of enthusiasm at the root of human spontaneous actions. These are the central marks of sainthood. As Sébastien Billioud explains, sudden awakening in this sense is close to the negation practice of the moral self. But it is not a radical rupture with the world; it is instead a profound transformation of the way one knows and acts in the world.¹⁹⁶ The second approach is the *gradual awakening* (*jianjiao*, 渐教). Mou suggests that this is a suitable way to experience the innate knowledge of good in its material aspect. In the course of gradual awakening, one undergoes an intermediate process of moral integration which takes place through occasional phases of clarity and authenticity. Mou genuinely agrees with Wang that, at least occasionally, such an experience is accessible to everyone; that is, the innate knowledge is easily accessible when we are clear about the way to know and act properly in a given situation. This was precisely the meaning of Wang's famous phrase, "the streets are full of saints" (*manjie jieshi shengren*, 满街皆是圣人).¹⁹⁷

The two approaches of retrospective verification are also the principal ways of moral education. They are intrinsically intertwined and supportive of each other. Contending with Wang Longxi (王龙溪, 1498-1583), one of Wang's senior disciples and the leading figure of the mid-Zhejiang school, Mou believes that sudden awakening is not necessarily exclusive to the most talented few. He also shows a reluctance to set sudden awakening in a superior position.¹⁹⁸ For anyone who aims to cultivate her personal life, the priority of sudden or gradual awakening is a contingent matter, depending upon her moral sensibilities and experiences. Whether she emphasises the former or the latter, she must follow the comprehensive instructions summarised in the Four Sentences.¹⁹⁹ In the course of differentiation and

¹⁹⁵ Billioud, *Thinking through Confucian Modernity*, 225. The first quote is from Jin Xin I, Mencius. The second quote is from Wang, *Instructions in Practical Living*, 153.

¹⁹⁶ Billioud, *Thinking through Confucian Modernity*, 226.

¹⁹⁷ Mou Zongsan, *Specifies of Chinese Philosophy* (Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1997), 80.

¹⁹⁸ Mou, *MS I*, 224-225. For the primary source of the four-absences teaching of Wang Longxi, see Wang Ji, "Instructions on the Tianquan Bridge," in *Complete Works of Wang Longxi* (Jinan: Shangdong Qilu Press, 1997), I, 1.

¹⁹⁹ Tang Junyi also distinguished two forms of self-cultivation: verification of the ultimate reality is self-cultivation (*wubenti ji gongfu*, 悟本体即工夫) and verification of the ultimate reality through self-cultivation (*you gongfu yi wubenti*, 由工夫以悟本体), and stressed that both of them have the same goal of verification of the ultimate reality. In the regard, his distinction is very close to Mou's. Tang Junyi, *The Origin of Chinese Philosophy: Section on Original Teachings* (Taipei: Student Publishing House, 1984), 363-364.

integration of the two approaches, Mou provides valuable direction for us when we attempt to apply them in practice:

The innate knowledge is the combination of the heart-mind and the Principle [of Nature], and it has its irresistible power to emerge. In the case of making one's will sincere, we mean the extension of knowledge. As far as the "extension" of knowledge is concerned, it is merely that the innate knowledge extends itself, not the other subject. Therefore, we must admit that the innate knowledge can manifest itself spontaneously everywhere and anytime. Retrospective verification must also try to reveal it simultaneously, and that verification should not be handled using a sense which has nothing to do with the innate knowledge. It is the vibrating power of the innate knowledge that awakens us and makes us reflect and confirm it. Therefore, verification is the reflection of the innate knowledge through its vibrational power...In this regard, there must be a kind of experience of the innate knowledge itself invoked by the doctrine of four maxims (or the doctrine of four presences [*siyou ju*, 四有句]). Because of the oppositional relationships (*duizhi guanxi*, 对治关系), the mind and the things are always there in pairs. The reason why it is called "presence" in the doctrine of four presences is that there are oppositions. If oppositions do not exist, the doctrine of four absences may apply...Therefore, the doctrine of four presences is neither a completely gradual awakening nor a thoroughly acquired learning (*houtian zhi xue*, 后天之学). With the focus on acquired learning, it is yet rooted in the innate knowledge as the basis for opposition which is a priori. It is gradual only because the opposition exists. This kind of gradualism has its basis in transcendent reality so that it contains the possibility of sudden awakening...Therefore, Wang Longxi's [doctrine of] four absences is not unrooted in the doctrine of Wang Yangming. Meanwhile, the doctrine of four maxims can also be said to be the thorough way of education. It is the common practice. For even the talented must also admit that they cannot be immune to any opposition or worldly cravings; still they are relatively less and easier to be conquered. Therefore, the doctrine of four absences is a perfect stage in the oppositional practice, and it seems that it cannot be independent. Since the doctrine of four maxims contains the basis of sudden awakening, it can reach the perfect stage when it happens, otherwise, the stage of gradual awakening.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Mou, *MS I*, 230-231. For a constructive interpretation of Wang Longxi's teaching about *a priori* learning of

Last but not least is the possible steps in the process of retrospective verification. While it occupies a relatively peripheral role and is thus far from systematic in Mou's mature works, he still gives certain clues. For instance, it involves cultivating a *habitus* which integrates one's deeds, thoughts, intentions and inner states. It could be a cumulative or transformative process, depending upon the sudden or gradual approaches she takes. But it is also important to remind that what is to be integrated into the process of retrospective verification is not the innate knowledge of good, for it itself is perfectly formed and self-sufficient. Instead, the target is one's state of vigilance (*jingjue*, 警觉). As Mou reckons, "the term 'extension' in the 'extension of knowledge' contains the notion of vigilance, and it initiates from vigilance. Vigilance also means 'retrospection', that is, being aware of the innate knowledge as it is revealed, not letting it slip through."²⁰¹ In other words, the practice of retrospective verification starts when a human agent become vigilant in her consciousness. That implies she awakes to the vibrational power of her innate knowledge in her wills and actions. As vigilance becomes her *habitus* and its strength grows, she can expect that it reaches the state of natural spontaneity. In the discussion of Lu Xiangshan, Mou describes this process vividly:

At the beginning, its vibrations [vibrations of heart-mind] generate a feeling of pain (*tongqie zhigan*, 痛切之感). After some time, things return to an easier and more peaceful way and even though there are still vibrations, they are devoid of pain. This feeling of pain refers to what could be termed a confession (*chanhui*, 忏悔). In an easy and peaceful state devoid of pain, vibrations are transformed and become constant vigilance (*chang xingxing*, 常惺惺). A normal (*pingping*, 平平) state is a state of constant quietness (*chang jiji*, 常寂寂). In the end, quietness is vigilance, vigilance is

rectifying the mind, see Peng, *The Unfolding of the Learning of Innate Knowledge of the Good*, 93-120. It is worth adding that in his later theory of perfect teaching, Mou gradually adopts a hermeneutic lens of Tiantai Buddhism (天台宗) when he judges the two doctrines again. As he writes, "that the three thousand worlds are immanent in an instance of thought, that the separation from the world is in reality an in-separation, and that the three paths are the three virtues as the marks [of the perfect teaching in the Tiantai Buddhist sense], [Wang Yangming's] doctrine of four presences should be classified as the distinctive teaching, whereas [his disciple Wang Longxi's] doctrine of four absences should be classified as the perfect teaching of the type of the ekayāna distinctive teaching." Mou Zongsan, *Theory of Perfect Teaching* (Taipei: Student Publishing, 1985), 324. For critical assessments of Mou's perfect teaching and its intellectual resources in Tiantai Buddhism, see Jason Clower, *The Unlikely Buddhologist: Tiantai Buddhism in Mou Zongsan's New Confucianism* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 229-250; Chan Wing-Cheuk, "On Mou Zongsan's Hermeneutic Application of Buddhism," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38, no. 2 (2011): 174-189. The paragraph cited here is adopted from Chan's translation.

²⁰¹ Mou, *MS I*, 188-189.

quietness: “obtaining without thinking, reaching centrality without constraint, actualising the way with serenity, so is the saint.”²⁰²

For him, such experience is not neutral. The harder one exercises this way, the more transparently and concretely her innate knowledge can manifest itself; therefore, the more strongly she can experience its force.²⁰³

Furthermore, Mou also helpfully distinguishes several states of retrospective verification in the above excerpt. In the initial state, a human agent still struggles with her various desires when she tries to escape from the “realm of attachment (*zhi*, 執).” Vibrations inevitably cause tensions and generate a sense of pain. Then she enters the next state in which things seem to become easier and more peaceful. And vibrations start to operate without causing any pain. More importantly, in the same state, a transformation takes place: vibrations become constant vigilance. The third state is one defined by the constancy and spontaneity of her vigilance. Moral integration has been achieved. In contrast to the first state, Mou reminds us at this stage that she is in the “realm of detachment (*wuzhi*, 无执).” This means that the operation of the innate knowledge is so free and smooth that her intentionality is now formulated in the best possible way. When dealing with the contingencies of the real world, detachment and attachment are still intertwined, but the latter has come under the guidance of the former and become its instrumental knowledge. Related to this phenomenon, her dispositions have been purified from selfish desires and interests and finally become the vectors determined by the subject with a certain direction and force. As Billioud usefully comments, in Mou’s understanding, the third state is also the final stage where the ideal of sainthood is realised. It is a state “beyond self-consciousness”, since one’s vigilance is constant and her pain is gone. It will come true when the spontaneity of her vigilance fully functions. Before that, she still have to go through the first and second states; namely, the intermediate process of retrospective verification, experiencing alertness, awakening, pain and confession, for all these are indications of a self-conscious process of moral formation.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, such a process is not always progressive. Reviewing the thought of Cheng Hao (程颢, 1032-85), Mou cautions that “as retrospective verification can be ascending, so can it also be declining.”²⁰⁵ Thus, for

²⁰² Mou Zongsan, *From Lu Xiangshan to Liu Jishan* (Taipei: Student Publishing, 1979), 117.

²⁰³ Mou Zongsan, *II*, 197.

²⁰⁴ Billioud, *Thinking through Confucian Modernity*, 213-215.

²⁰⁵ Mou, *MS II*, 196.

any discerning people, there is no safety zone. To avoid the possibility of declination, we must make an effort to keep vigilant, and our effort must be conscientious.

In brief, responsible action in the Confucian tradition is a moral practice of retrospective verification. Since Mencius, it has been deeply integrated into the teachings of inner sainthood and exclusively focused on the cultivation of the moral self. Its distinctive assumptions, dynamics and approaches were masterfully synthesised by Wang Yangming into his unique conception of the extension of knowledge. At these critical points, Mou Zongsan inherits the thought of his forerunners and strives to revive the spirit of their doctrines. For him, the innate knowledge of good is a fully formed moral subject which manifests itself in the form of the Principle of Nature under a specific circumstance. Under its enlightenment, human agents can see the necessity of the situation and respond to it properly. Thus, what is required in their moral formation is not to develop some moral potential towards maturity; instead, it is merely to discover the pure and perfect nature of their innermost authentic selves. Since the innate knowledge of good always actualises itself dynamically and concretely, the proper action corresponding to it is nothing but exerting effort to master oneself in specific affairs. As Wang famously put it (with Mou sincerely agreeing), “One must be trained and polished in the actual affairs of life. Only then can one stand firm and remain calm, whether in activity or in tranquillity.”²⁰⁶ This is the very task of retrospective verification. As the way towards this supreme kind of sensibility and spontaneity, its intrinsic dynamics can be summarised in the doctrine of four maxims and applied without discrimination into any individual’s life. It is a highly contingent matter, however, when people are determined to exercise it, given the fact that they are distinct from each other in terms of talent, character and experience. In the course of retrospective verification, they may encounter sudden awakening or gradual awakening, starting from painful vigilance and reaching a state of peace and spontaneity in which the vibrations of the innate knowledge are identical to their constant vigilance. Correspondingly, at this stage marked by sainthood, they may embrace the creative and flourishing activities of the Principle of Nature by allowing themselves to love and serve others freely. From the beginning to the end, Mou stresses that the discovering of the responsible self in a variety of situated actions is the primary focus of retrospective verification. Beyond it, there is no other way towards sainthood. His life, we may add, dedicated to restoring and expanding the previous teachings of sainthood, can be put into the same category. With its nobility and credibility, it itself can be counted as a responsible action to “ordain conscience for Heaven and Earth and

²⁰⁶ Wang, *Instructions for Practical Living*, 28.

continue lost teachings for past saints (*wei tiandi lixin, wei wangsheng jijuexue*, 为天地立心, 为往圣继绝学).”²⁰⁷

4.4 Comparative observations

Human beings are teleological creature. We cannot make sense of our lives without a clear sense of our telos. As Mark Twain incisively commented, the two most important days in our life are the day we are born and the day we find out why. On the road of seeking and understanding, however, there are tremendous obstacles, traps and temptations. After a careful examination of the notions of the responsible action given by Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan, we may identify some specific features of these promising accounts, i.e., in their ability to respond to the above challenge. Adopting the classic formula of teleological ethics refashioned recently by Alasdair MacIntyre, we may say that the fundamental task of moral instructions is to assist us in finding a sustainable way to move from what we are to what we ought to be.²⁰⁸ In this respect, we can appreciate the remarkable teleological elements in the moral theories of Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan, both in the category of act-deontology.²⁰⁹ This unique formulation separates them from ancient or modern teleology, for what is desirable to human agents is justified not by our intentions, instincts or ideals, but by the compelling reality which precedes our wills and actions. In other words, what is now at stake is not objectives, but the being and action of the Subject who alone determines proper being and action in moral formation. In this way, Barth and Mou each define the purpose of human responsible action and the method to achieve it. For Barth, Jesus Christ in His Spirit plays a key role. As the Word of God, He alone provides direction, motivation and force in human vocation. He wants people to have union with Himself as His covenantal partners and become His witness to others and the world. To accomplish this two-fold objective, He enables humans to undertake faith, obedience and confession as the primary responsible action, with service as the secondary action. For Mou, the innate knowledge of good plays a similar role, as the massive iceberg of human morality. It is its constant and spontaneous vibrations that make responsible human actions possible. As the

²⁰⁷ See Mou’s *AF* for more details. The quote is from Zhang Zai (张载), a Confucian intellectual in the Song Dynasty Mou respects and admires. Tang Junyi once called this kind of effort a “historical investigation with religious conviction.” Tang Junyi, *The Origin of Chinese Philosophy: Section on Origination* (Taipei: Student Publishing House, 1974), preface.

²⁰⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). For a recent constructive discussion of MacIntyre’s ethics and its political relevance, see Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), Chapter 5.

²⁰⁹ See Chapter 3, especially the conclusion.

supreme good of the Heaven and the Earth, it mandates responsible action to discern the good and the evil in the effort of investigating things of different kinds and in different situations. It is therefore interesting to find that, before considering the particular form and content of human responsible actions, both Barth and Mou describe the fundamental reality centred on the relationship between the Subject and the self. For Barth, this kind of relationship refers primarily to an interpersonal fellowship between Christ and human agents. For Mou, it points to the inner states of oneself, which involve congenial interactions between her proper nature on the one hand and her actual mind and will on the other. Putting attention on different realms, Barth and Mou seem to agree on the perfect order of relationships. That is, the Subject must take the lead, and the self must follow. A robust instruction for human responsible action must facilitate its realisation in living practices. Here the nascent invention, shared by Barth and Mou, is an effort to reconstruct the general formula of teleological ethics. For them, if we want to take intelligible, responsible human action according to particular traditions, it is necessary not only to maintain the directional orientations of our actions, but more importantly, to ground these directions in relational visions.

Relating to the assumptions of human responsible action, there is common stress on the alternation of the human situation and the dramatic way towards the responsible self. It is not surprising to see that both Barth and Mou use the term “awakening” to sketch such a rupture in human lives and actions. It involves their right-turn practice regarding the way they know and act in the world as well as the relationship between the old and new outlooks of their lives. In other words, it is used to distinguish two contrasting states – before and after their enlightenment. For the two thinkers, only through this profound experience can human agents realise that the genuine process of their moral formation is far from linear – it is much closer to a radical transformation. In Barth’s terminology, the concept of awakening addresses the formal character of human vocation. It highlights vocation as a dynamic process in which Jesus Christ illuminates humans with the knowledge of God and themselves, and transforms them to become Christians. In Mou’s language, the same concept describes their multiple experiences of the innate knowledge of good in its two-dimensional activities. Specifically, they may undergo sudden awakening when they switch to a perfect way for the innate knowledge to operate consistently, and gradual awakening when they go through an intermediate process of moral integration in which the innate knowledge manifests itself in occasional phases. From a comparative perspective, we can see that Barth is more straightforward in designating the formal aspect of human responsible action, while Mou is more careful in distinguishing the incremental and radical types of the same action. The reason for this minor divergence is two-

fold. For Barth, human vocation is utterly shaped by the person and work of Jesus Christ; therefore, the action of awakening is the proper notion to describe His miraculous and gracious action, regardless of diverse experiences. For Mou, the practice and progress of retrospective verification is a personal matter, depending upon the actual interaction between the vigilance of one's consciousness and the vibrations of her innate knowledge. Thus, it is helpful to give more subtle and specific directions for individuals under the sub-categories of the same notion. Nevertheless, underlying their different considerations, a similar outcome of human responsible actions can be found in their expectations. That is, through the casting process of various responsible actions, human wills and actions become the ideal vectors of the ultimate beings in action.

The last aspect of comparison concerns the principle of human responsible actions and the priorities in it. For both Barth and Mou, this material issue of the responsible action does not infer something less essential than the previous issues we have discussed. It is critically important for human practical reasoning to discern whether a particular action is valid or whether it is more important than another. Thus, compared with the above aspects of human responsible action, the current one provides the most concrete and precise guidance for moral practice. For Barth, the ethics of the kingdom of God defines the principle of diverse actions in vocation. God always points the Christian to her neighbours first, and by pointing to her neighbours she points herself to God. This imperative implies that, in the course of vocation, concerns about the divine command of God and the demands of the others must always precede those of a human agent herself. Her priority thus must follow an order from Heaven to Earth, from the communal to the individual, and finally, from the others to the self. To cover all these orientations in their service, Barth deliberately chooses the notion of supreme objectivity, which inspires us to articulate a parallel but underdeveloped concept in his counterpart. Indeed, although Mou never explicitly uses the term supreme subjectivity, his practical reflections certainly contains this idea. For him, human responsible actions must follow the ethics of extending knowledge, which requires rectifying the mind and making the will sincere through loving and serving others in concrete situations. Therefore, the priority of a person's concerns in retrospective verification must follow a converse order, that is, from the self to the others, from the individual to the communal, and ultimately, from the Earth to Heaven. In both principles, others have an intrinsic role in responsible actions and cannot be ignored or alienated in moral formation.

Moreover, only in the course of serving and loving the others is a person acting as a responsible self to love and serve her God or to extend her innate knowledge to its utmost. For

the two thinkers, this maxim is true for individuals as well as communities. Genuine humanity emerges from our recognition and respect of others' humanity, as we respect ourselves. It involves our intentional construction of meaningful connections with our neighbours, both near and distant. It succeeds when we can master our responsible actions for others and for ourselves. As Bishop Desmond Tutu insightfully put it, "When we see others as the enemy, we risk becoming what we hate. When we oppress others, we end up oppressing ourselves. All of our humanity is dependent upon recognising the humanity in others."²¹⁰ In short, because of others, a human agent has a chance to become a responsible being in action.

The distinctive character of the ethics of human responsible action is now evident in terms of its presuppositions, forms and contents. It is a unique synthesis of teleological elements under act-deontological frames. It is faithful to religious doctrines or moral traditions and offers clear and concrete mandates to direct our life practices. It is fully aware of the temptations of our self-projection and insists on the necessity of self-negation in our moral formation. It intends neither to instrumentalise our neighbours nor to demonise our enemies but always to develop responsible relationships with them. Finally, it teaches that the ultimate goals for humankind (and for our societies) are beyond our agenda; what we can and must do is to live out genuine responsible and loving relationships with ourselves and with others. For Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan, the most appropriate usage of our moral capacity is not to set ultimate purposes for ourselves, but to seek guidance from internal or external sources of responsibility. The metaphor of a vortex shows the architectural convergence and divergence between the two thinkers. For meteorologists, a vortex is a whirling mass of air or water. Here we may change the natural substance into the elements of human responsible action. In the horizontal dimension, the self is at the centre and the others are at the periphery. In the vertical dimension, the divine is at the top and the human at the bottom. We can see that the formation of human morality is much like the formation of a vortex. In Barth's version, clouds, rain and wind spiral down into a vortex from the periphery to the centre. This internally rotating vortex is directed from the top and enforced from the periphery. In Mou's version, however, the similar mass of substances swirls up from the centre to the edge, and this externally rotating vortex is directed from the bottom and enforced from the centre. When all these elements interact well with each other, the vortex will accumulate in size and force, and when it grows strong enough, it will become a hurricane. Both Barth and Mou contended with totalitarianism and recognised the power of such a formidable existence in human life. But unlike the liberal thinkers in Chapter 1, who reacted

²¹⁰ Desmond Tutu, *God Has A Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 49-50.

with intolerance and abhorrence, these two are devoted to exploring its dynamics, with the hope of nurturing rather than trampling humanity. A particular but important field of human life for their exploration is politics. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is in political engagement and reflection that their practical theories of responsibility find vital expression.

Chapter 5

Political Responsibility and the Spirit of the Common Life

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the political conceptions of responsible action in the ethics of Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan. Political responsibility is a particular form of human responsibility actualised in political contexts, playing a crucial role in the forming and sustaining of communal human life. It consists of various political decisions, judgements and attitudes towards different political arrangements which are somehow praiseworthy or blameworthy. It grounds the ethical foundation of politics by setting normative questions such as: for what forms of a political community must our responsible action stand? What forms we must reject? For what reasons and to what extent should our ethical motives guide our political endeavour? As a collective upholding a certain substantial worldview, how should a moral community be responsible for the political community as its counterpart? Responding to these difficult questions, Barth and Mou develop an integral part of their ethics along with their discussions of responsible actions informed by their traditions. As we have seen in Chapter 4, for these two thinkers, human responsible actions emerge when they follow the ultimate subjects of morality in their wills and deeds. To identify these ultimate moral subjects and search for the genuine ways of human response, they need to engage in their distinct religious or moral traditions. However, when the two thinkers enter the political field, it is intriguing to see that both encounter the same tradition – democratic socialism – and articulate their political ethics by referring to its prominent figures.¹ Thinking and working within this tradition, Barth and Mou not only learn the purpose

¹ It may be useful to introduce briefly the democratic socialist tradition. We can trace the modern source of socialism to the original ideas of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, which were then revised by later thinkers such as Karl Marx, Eduard Bernstein, Rosa Luxemburg, and Sidney Webb. Along with these intellectual developments, there have been multiple forms of socialist movements developed in diverse political, cultural, religious, and economic contexts. They include Christian socialism, Syndicalism, Fabian Collectivism, French communalism, guild socialism, Marxian Social Democracy, and many others. Whether in England, France or Germany, socialism has emerged as an attempt to replace competitive capitalism with a cooperative mode of the political economy towards the common good. Underlying these diverse categories of democratic socialism, as Dorrien indicates in his massive *Imagining Democratic Socialism*, is the “the ethical passion for social justice and radical democratic community.” Such moral impulse “retains the original socialist idea in multiple forms, playing out in struggles for freedom, equality, recognition, and democratic commonwealth. It conceives democracy in terms of the character of relationships in a society, not mere voting rights.” (4) For these reasons, Dorrien argues that communism does not belong to this tradition because of its prominent philosophy of mechanical materialism, its preferred means of revolutionary violence and its *de facto* political-ideological autocracy. As we shall illustrate later, both Barth and Mou express ethical concerns about such mischief and are highly critical of Communist regimes in European and Asian contexts. Still, as both thinkers remind us, communism is a rupture in democratic socialism and must be taken seriously since its entry into history with the 1848 Manifesto. Political ethics informed by the idea of

and means of democratic politics, they also enrich the ethical aspect of the tradition, which inspires its practitioners to build genuinely democratic communities.

Therefore, their unique versions of political ethics centred on the concept of responsibility are the third and last theme of our comparative project. On the one hand, Barth and Mou have a certain consensus on the basic principles of democratic socialism such as the rule of law and social justice. On the other hand, their reception of Social Democracy is a highly contextualized matter, shaped by their ethical concerns, the primary agenda in debates, and the political-cultural elements of their societies. For example, working in the early period of institutional learning, Mou's version of Social Democracy represents a political blueprint for modern Confucianism which has strong hints of a thought experiment; in Barth's version, there is more space for connecting Social Democracy with Protestantism as the two established traditions in theory and practice. Regrettably, in recent discussions scholars are still paying insufficient attention to the practical ethics of the two thinkers, instead generating observations based mainly on their theological or philosophical discourses. In Barth's case, focusing on his early career of crisis theology, Gary Dorrien raises a severe criticism: that Barth's theological narrowness and political one-sidedness caused tremendous damage to the social democratic movement.² For George Hunsinger, Kathryn Tanner and others who are sympathetic to Barth's position, the contribution of his theological discourses to democratic politics is still limited.³ A similar charge prevails in the study of the political thought of Mou Zongsan. For instance, Lin Yu-sheng expresses strong suspicion about the practical significance of Mou's abstract principles of democracy.⁴ Moreover, Yu Ying-shih complains that, starting in the 1950s, Mou's passion for reviving the Confucian tradition led him to collaborate with the Republican Party in Taiwan and avoid criticism of its political dictatorship.⁵ That is to say, Mou's Confucian

responsibility thus assists Barth and Mou in discerning both the rights and wrongs of Communism and the broader tradition of democratic socialism. See Gary Dorrien, *Imagining Democratic Socialism: Political Theology, Marxism, and Social Democracy* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2019).

² Ibid., 218.

³ George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 142; Kathryn Tanner, "Barth and the Economy of Grace," in *Commanding Grace: Studies in Karl Barth's Ethics*, ed. Daniel L. Migliore (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 176–197; John W. De. Cruchy, *Christianity and Democracy: A Theology for A Just World Order* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 242. For a comprehensive review of Barth scholarship at this point, see David Haddorff, "Karl Barth's Theological Politics," introduction to Karl Barth, *CSC*, 1–5.

⁴ Lin Yu-sheng, "Dilemma Faced by Neo-Confucianism in Promoting Democratic Theory in China," in *Political Order and Plural Society* (Taipei: Linking Publishing, 1989), 337–349. For a Confucian response to the criticism, see Lee Ming-Huei, "How Can Confucianism Generate Democracy and Science?" in *Confucianism and Modern Consciousness* (Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2016), 1–21.

⁵ Yu, Ying-shih, "The Intellectual Orientation of the Neo-Confucians Based on *The Democratic Review: A Discussion about Mou Zongsan's 'Practical Concern'*," Preface, in Peng Guoxiang, *Practical Concerns of a Saint: Political and Social Thought of Mou Zongsan* (Taipei: Linking Publishing, 2016), 29–33. The self-declaration of Mou Zongsan on which Yu's criticism is based can be found in Cai Renhou, *Chronicle of Mou Zongsan* (Taipei:

ethics may in practice cause political blindness, or even worse, political opportunism. To correct these misperceptions, we must be aware that while both Barth and Mou belong to democratic socialism as a political tradition, both develop their conceptions of responsible actions not for theoretical purposes but to empower democratic engagement and live out democratic virtues in real political struggles. For these reasons, we argue that it is better to regard their political ethics as theories of praxis, containing critical judgement on political orders and actions. The initial evidence we shall provide is from intellectual history, namely, records of their interactions and intellectual inheritance. The other evidence comes from their essential political texts, which clearly show their propositions on human political systems and responsible actions towards them. In conclusion, we shall compare their profound visions of political community and their proposals for a responsible role in that community.

5.2 Karl Barth: witness as a responsible religious socialist

The young Karl Barth first encountered the social democratic movement in his hometown of Safenwil in Switzerland, where local people preferred to call it religious socialism. The reason the movement attracted the young pastor was simple. During his ministerial career, Barth found that his tiny congregation was full of farmers, shopkeepers, and workers from nearby knitting mills and dye factories. They were subject to low wages and dangerous working conditions, and they lacked organisational protection from the church or trade unions. Only religious socialists cared about these people, responded to their miserable living conditions, and fought for their integrity, equality and welfare. In other words, their expressed solidarity with the local working class represented a genuine Christian way of service and witness beyond traditional pastoral concerns. Years later, Barth still remembered the influence of this widespread movement within the church: “Every young Swiss pastor who was not asleep or living somehow behind the moon or for whatever reason errant, was at that time in the narrower or the wider sense a ‘Religious Socialist.’ We became—in negative things more certain to be sure than in the positive—powerfully antibürgerlich.”⁶ Introduced by his intimate friend and fellow minister Eduard Thurneysen, Barth began to contact the intellectual leaders of religious socialism, Zurich pastor Hermann Kutter and University of Zurich theologian Leonhard Ragaz, as well as their spiritual mentor, German pastor Christoph Blumhardt. These religious socialists’ passion for the kingdom of God was new to Barth, quite different from the scorn poured on it by his liberal

Student Publishing House, 1996), 16.

⁶ Karl Barth, “Rückblick,” in *Karl Barth: Offene Briefe, 1945–1968* (Zurich: TVZ, 1984), 189.

teachers. Now he had new teachers who combined Christian faith and socialist politics. As Barth later recalled, “From Kutter I simply learned to speak the great word ‘God’ seriously, responsibly, and with a sense of its importance. From Blumhardt I learned just as simply (at least at the beginning) what it meant to speak of Christian hope.”⁷ Immersing himself in labour rights, trade union issues, and factory legislation, Barth became a leftist pastor in the mould of his three socialist exemplars. It is not exaggerating to say that such political engagement was formative for him, long before he grew to be a professional theologian.

Among the three leading figures of religious socialism, Blumhardt was the most senior. Following in his father’s footsteps, he became a pastor and faith-healing evangelist in Germany. Blumhardt had charisma and an unshakeable longing for the kingdom of God, injecting spiritual strength into a mass crusade, starting from Berlin and spreading across the nation. Throughout his preaching he emphasised that the kingdom of God was about a new world coming as reality: “God is now creating a new reality on earth, a reality to come first among men but finally over all creation, so that the earth and the heavens are renewed.”⁸ Embracing this new reality was his ultimate concern. However, it was not a task of philosophical speculation, and not even of religious meditation, but rather of decisive participation. For Blumhardt, the kingdom of God came not through logical concepts but through surprises; thus one must be discerning in real-life spheres and activities. Against the mainstream perceptions within the church, he insisted that Social Democracy was precisely the political witness for God’s action in the real world. Although weary of politics, he did not want to shirk his role as a responsible witness. Thus, he not only showed political empathy toward the social democratic movement but also determined to engage in it as part of his vocation. Ignoring the church’s warning against joining the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), he became a member in 1899 and served as a party delegate in the Württemberg legislature for six years. This cost Blumhardt his ministerial career in the state church, as well as most of his followers, but he refused to compromise. However, neither did he make his socialism equal to the kingdom of God itself. In the course of political participation, he joyfully anticipated the coming of the kingdom and made every effort to be a truthful and faithful witness to it. Here Barth found the essence of a responsible way of political life. “The unique element, and I say it quite deliberately, the prophetic, in Blumhardt’s message and mission consists in the way in which the hurrying and the waiting, the worldly and the

⁷ Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 263.

⁸ Christoph Blumhardt, *Thy Kingdom Come: A Blumhardt Reader*, ed. Vernard Eller (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 3; See also Christoph Blumhardt, *Action in Waiting* (Rifton, NY: Plough, 2012), 1–22, 129–135.

divine, the present and the coming, again and again meet, were united, supplemented one another, sought and found one another.”⁹

In many ways, Kutter can be seen as a student of Blumhardt. He agreed with Blumhardt that Social Democracy must be taken as a secular parable of the coming of the kingdom of God, and he also expressed his religious piety in the form of political engagement. In 1903 Kutter published a manifesto: *They Must; or, God and the Social Democracy*. This highly polemical text pushed him to the edge of the movement and shaped the public debate around Social Democracy. At the beginning of the work, Kutter declared that social democrats in his age were similar to the early Christians, for both opposed the dominant powers of their time and thus inaugurated a new aeon in their actions. As he stated, “They all have a force in them which will not abide question, an imperative which hardly realises itself, but which will and must create that to which it impels. They must!”¹⁰ In contrast to the social democratic movement, both the state church and the capitalist society it inhabited were fettered and bound: “Thus we had a weak capitalism and a weak Christianity; but over against them, a strong Social Democracy, holding fast to a philosophic doctrinairism which the giant mind of Marx had carried to an extreme height.” Absorbing Marxist dialectical reasoning but resisting its historical abstractions, Kutter gave the socialist practice a theoretical expression in his formulation of theses and negations. The Christian core of the socialist movement, he reasoned, must be a recovery of the kingdom of God, which had been dismissed in the German state churches and by the advocates of German social Christianity such as Adolph von Harnack, Friedrich Naumann (1860-1919), and Adolph Stöcker (1835-1909). Like Blumhardt, he was passionately concerned with the reality of God. Since mainstream Christianity failed to recognise the genuine concern and actions of God for oppressed people (whether in the Bible or in Kutter’s time), it was not surprising that God used an anti-Christian movement to recover the original meaning of love and justice. Therefore, responding to the critiques of Social Democracy by Harnack and others, Kutter charged that the “Christianity” these figures represented had in fact become a major hindrance to knowing and following the living God.¹¹ In this way, he urged his readers to action, to learn from the socialists how to transform the church and thus make it useful to God again. Otherwise, how could the church be called a Christian community and become a witness to the world?

⁹ Karl Barth, “Past and Future: Friedrich Naumann and Christoph Blumhardt,” in *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, ed. J. A. Robinson, trans. K. R. Crim (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968), 44.

¹⁰ Hermann Kutter, *They Must; or, God and the Social Democracy* (Chicago: Co-operative Printing, 1908), 110.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

In the same year of the publication of Kutter's manifesto, Ragaz organised a workers' strike in the construction industry, insisting that the Lord was on the side of the oppressed workers. Like Kutter, he challenged the German state church and its prominent theologians by declaring that if the church was unwilling to support the labour movement, it could not be the salt of the earth anymore. Unsurprisingly, his sermon attracted sharply different responses from its labour audience and their opponents. When Ragaz read Kutter's book, he admired his intellectual brevity and spiritual insights. The two figures soon met each other and co-founded an organisation in which Ragaz played an active leading role, with Kutter as his close prophet. Eventually, they decided to launch two journals to fuel Swiss religious socialism over the long run. Compared to Kutter, Ragaz preferred to categorise himself as a political activist. He taught that being a Christian socialist meant being involved in social democratic politics; for him, it simply made no sense to embrace democratic socialism without fighting for its political causes. He regularly wrote and spoke for the labour movement and urged the church to participate in their common cause of social justice. For him, a new age had already come, with democracy and equality as its signs, when capitalism would be discredited and abandoned. Living in this new reality required people to cooperate instead of compete: "Now an order is emerging in which people work together for a common goal, no longer against each other but for each other."¹² For the same reason, while agreeing on the Marxist critique of capitalism, Ragaz held to an uncompromising antimilitarism which distanced him from Marxist revolutionaries and was congenial to the incremental agenda of Social Democracy. The emergent Bolshevism in Russia, in his view, was thus an enemy of socialism, which he saw as inherently democratic and nonviolent in society as well as in politics. His steadfast Christian ethics of hope was the ground of a democratic vision for the labour movement. The living God is a God of hope, who cannot be captured by any system or remembered only in the past. Instead, it is His gracious will that all people and the earth will be redeemed: "We are to breathe freely in the freedom of God and become united in a Kingdom of freedom, purity, justice, and love."¹³ Anyone who embraces God's hope for the world will find herself in a responsible and loving relationship with other people. All these arguments were inherited by Barth already in his dialectical period, although he regarded his vocation as a dogmatic theologian rather than an activist.

¹² Leonhard Ragaz, "The Gospel and the Current Social Struggle," in *Signs of the Kingdom: A Ragaz Reader*, ed. and trans. Paul Bock (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 3–15.

¹³ Ragaz, "Thy Kingdom Come," in *Signs of the Kingdom*, 18–21.

For Barth, being a religious socialist meant being responsible for the labour movement in his decisions and actions. The fact that he twice joined SPD is illustrative. On 5 February 1915, he reported his decision in a letter to Thurneysen:

I have now become a member of the Social Democratic Party. Just because I set such emphasis Sunday by Sunday upon the last things, it was no longer possible for me personally to remain suspended in the clouds above the present evil world. Rather it had to be demonstrated here and now that faith in the Greatest does not exclude, but includes work and suffering in the realm of the imperfect.

He continued:

The socialists in my congregation will now, I hope, have a right understanding of my public criticisms of the party. And I myself hope now to avoid becoming unfaithful to our “essential” orientation, as might very well have happened had I taken this step two years ago. I have for now refused all partisan political activity; my involvement consists of paying dues and giving lectures.¹⁴

Nearly two decades later, when Hitler gained ultimate power, SPD came under fierce attack from the Nazi state machine. Following party discipline, many members resigned to prevent a bloodbath. Barth, by contrast, made the unusual decision to *re-join* the party at this time. In his reply to Paul Tillich, another theological advocate of socialism and member of the SPD, he listed four reasons: SPD was the party of the working class and of democracy, and it stood against antimilitarism and for judicious patriotism. For Barth this was a political choice, for concrete reasons, rather than a religious endorsement of the socialist worldview: “As an idea and worldview, I can bring to it neither fear nor love nor trust. Membership in the SPD means for me simply a practical political decision.”¹⁵ Faithful to his “essential” orientation, and meanwhile responsive to political situations, Barth in his unique decision interpreted the meaning of acting as a responsible religious socialist.

Moreover, for Barth, such responsible action also includes an intellectual dimension, that is, a sober judgement of democratic socialism. Cautious about ideological orientations, Barth

¹⁴ Letter from Barth to Thurneysen, dated February 5, 1915, in *Revolutionary Theory in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914-1925*, trans. James D. Smart (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964).

¹⁵ Letter from Barth to Tillich, dated April 2, 1933, *Evangelische Kommentar* 10 (1977), 111–115.

asked what kind of socialism was qualified to be a genuinely liberating movement for humanity. According to Jüngel, Barth from early in his career made explicit the basic principles of goal, means, and content. First, the aim of socialism must be the free and pure personality, redeemed by transcendent power from bourgeois egoism, false idealism, and individual Christianity. Second, the socialist means must associate with its faith in truth and hope of victory. It thus must seek another source for its organised strength instead of being obsessed with political and economic power struggles. Otherwise, it will become one “bickering, foul-smelling, compromising party among others” and stand against its own truth claims.¹⁶ Third and most important, the essence of socialism must be extended to justice for all humanity rather than simply improvement of the working classes. The danger of a self-indulging labour movement, in Barth’s reflection, is the temptation to degrade itself into a form of egotistical socialism, merely the counterpart of bourgeois egoism. In opposition to this, socialism must herald its essence – a passion for justice for everyone.¹⁷

With these principles, it is not difficult to understand Barth’s critical and expressed solidarity with democratic socialism. For him, the kingdom of God, revealed and actualised in the work of Jesus Christ, is the basic fact of life. Socialism represents a kind of human praxis corresponding to the work of God. In the best sense, it is still one of many worldly realities and works as a sign of the real kingdom of God. It can never replace the kingdom of God; rather, in it “God is taken seriously politically.”¹⁸ For young Barth, a robust theological undertaking of democratic socialist politics starts from a clear *distinction* of socialism from the Kingdom. The socialist endeavour is responsible actions which reflect the work of God. As McCormack notices, this theological position located Barth closer to Blumhardt and Kutter than to Ragaz.¹⁹ For Dorrien, however, the fact that Barth contrasted socialism with the kingdom of God and emphasised the latter as the ultimate reality of human life indicate his unsupportive attitude to religious socialism, especially Ragaz’s version of activism.²⁰ Our previous discussion shows that this is an exaggeration because Barth’s criticism was internal and constructive; it may be fairer to see Barth as a critical, responsible participant in religious socialism. This image

¹⁶ Karl Barth, “The Intrinsic Future of Social Democracy,” dated August 12, 1915, unpublished sketch (Karl Barth Archive, Basel).

¹⁷ Ibid. See also Jüngel’s summary on Barth’s judgement of social democracy, Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth, A Theology Legacy*, trans. Garrett E. Paul (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 89.

¹⁸ Jüngel, *Karl Barth*, 93.

¹⁹ Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 123–125.

²⁰ Dorrien, *Imagining Democratic Socialism*, 233–237.

underwent substantial revision as Barth encountered new themes and concerns, but its core never altered, if we consider the development of his theological politics in a series of texts.

In 1935, just one year after the Barmen Declaration, Barth advanced his critical stance by publishing a small monograph, *Gospel and Law*, based on his lecture of the same name.²¹ The two concepts were of course deeply indebted to the Lutheran tradition, but Barth paradigmatically reconfigured them to address the primary features of the commanding grace and the church's responsible actions against Nazi dominance. For Luther the distinction between Law and Gospel is built on the Scriptural teachings: Law (Gesetz) is the demand of God imposed on human beings which exposes their sin, i.e., that they are unable to follow God's command (Gebot) and thus demonstrate their need to rely entirely on God's grace; while Gospel as the forgiving message of sin makes Christ and his righteousness (Rechtfertigung) the property of the sinner as their justification. In other words, as demand and promise, Law and Gospel express the single loving will of God. Based on this insight, Luther developed two distinct usages of Law. In its theological usage, Law is a mirror that reveals sin and convicts sinners. Its role is necessary but negative for the fulfilment of God's commandment. This led to Luther's political usage of the Law, viewing it as a bridle that restrains evil and secures civic order.²² For these reasons, Luther himself opened a door for his followers to uphold the natural and social structures of creaturely life (e.g., the family, the people and the state) as the expression of the Creator's original will and argue that they enjoy independent authority to the "orders of creation" apart from Christ and Scripture.²³ In the interpretations of Lutheran theologians such as Wilhelm Stapel (1882-1954) and Emanuel Hirsch (1888-1973), Barth finds that such theological and political concepts of law had been appropriated to justify the emerging ideology of *Volksnomos* associated with German Christians. His decisive response in the lecture was clear: for anyone who intends to correct the political errors of Nazism, her primary task must be to correct the theological errors of Lutheranism.

²¹ See Chapter 2.

²² In Luther's account, the Law in the Scripture and law in general are used interchangeably. The former means the commandments of God which include the Decalogue and the Levitical codes, while the latter means any legal code enforced by coercion and punishment. Luther correlates the two through the conception of natural law as the legacy of medieval scholasticism. See Derek Woodard-Lehman, "The Law as the Task of the Gospel: Karl Barth and the Possibility of an Apostolic Pragmatism", *Journal of Jewish Ethics* 2, no. 1(2016): 65-66.

²³ In his early theology prior to the 1930s, Barth defends similar doctrines to the orders of creation. Beginning with the Church Dogmatics, however, he shifts his position and reject them. For the intellectual developments of this record, see Paul Nimmo, "The Order of Creation in the Theological Ethics of Karl Barth", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, no. 1(2007): 24-35.

Agreeing with Luther, Barth accepts the benefit of distinguishing gospel and law in Christian faith. But against the reinterpretations of his Lutheran contemporaries, Barth insists that the Law must be understood *in* the Gospel, and with the Gospel *as its end*. It is a mistake, he says, to separate them into different ethical categories such as “more and less, better and worse”, or “between divine and human or good and evil.”²⁴ Instead, both Gospel and Law must be seen as different aspects of the same subject, Jesus Christ, the one Word of God. As the content of the Word, the Gospel takes priority over the Law because it reveals what God has done and will do for us in Jesus Christ. By contrast, the Law as the form of the Word tells us what humans must do for God. In this way, he inverts Luther’s formula “Law and Gospel” to “Gospel and Law” and further proposes that Gospel itself has the form and fashion of Law, because God’s grace is no more and no less than His commanding grace. He states, “The *Law in the Gospel* as the tablets from Sinai were in the ark of the covenant, in such a way that the *Gospel* is always *in the Law* as that which is manifest, proclaimed, as that which concerns man in the crib and in swaddling clothes of the commands, of the command and order of God.”²⁵ It can be said that, to overcome latent dualism in Lutheranism, Barth proposes a nuanced solution to the formula by maintaining the unity of Law and Gospel without separation or division, for both derive from the divine revelation of God. Even further, grounded in the one Word of God, Law must be seen as the revelation and work of our gracious God. As he outlines, and as we explained in Chapter 3, it is a prior decision concerning self-determination of human beings. It is the claiming of their freedom, and it regulates and judges their use of such freedom. In sum, the role of the Law is now not entirely negative. It becomes an imperative, serving a positive purpose guidance for our wills and actions. Here Barth introduces the third or ethical use of Law, which can be traced back to John Calvin and the Reformed heritage. But he goes further by suggesting a Christological concept of Law, allowing him to anchor his theology of divine command firmly in the divine revelation of Jesus Christ as commanding grace or gracious commandment of God.

Barth’s concern is not limited to dogmatics; his intension is rather an explicit connection between dogmatics and politics. For Barth, it is of critical importance for dogmatical thinking that one must move from Gospel to Law, just as she must go from justification to sanctification, from faith to works, and from Church to State. Such insistence on the proper order of Gospel and Law excludes any foundation in natural law or orders of creation.²⁶ More precisely,

²⁴ Karl Barth, “Gospel and Law,” in *CSC*, 76-81.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 80. Italics in original.

²⁶ Karl Barth, *Karl Barth's Table Talk*, ed. John D. Godsey (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 7. Barth’s fully

grounded in the Word of God, divine command would not be assimilated into the law of the *Reith* or the spirit of the *Volk*; rather, it always stands in antithesis to them. Furthermore, since the Law can be effected only in the light of the Gospel, in which God's gracious reconciliation of sinners is revealed and actualised in the world, the new order of Gospel and Law thus defines the positive identity of the church as the prophetic witness of the Word:

The Church would not be the Church if, in her very existence, but also in her teaching and keeping of the Law of God, its *commands*, its *questions*, its *admonitions*, and its *accusations* would not become visible and apprehensible also for the world, for state and society...The Church would not be the Church if these aspects of the Law would not, as such, become the prophetic witness *for* the will of God *against* all of men's sinful presumption, *against* all their lawlessness and unrighteous. Thus, we can certainly make the general and comprehensive statement that the Law is nothing else than the necessary *form of the Gospel*, whose content is grace.²⁷

To fulfil this role, the Christian community must be faithful to the Gospel in its prayer, repentance, and forgiveness. These moral actions lead both to free obedience to God's command and direct Christian witness to the grace of God, "which has accomplished everything for us and whose end must be this accomplishment."²⁸ For Barth, when these actions are seriously undertaken by the church, the misleading Nazi project, which sanctified the political order of National Socialism as the embodied Law of God, can be challenged and dismantled. As he correctly insists, "Thus there can never be claims and demands which would have legal validity from another source or in themselves: there can only be witnesses."²⁹ In other words, to be responsible for the Word in her political witness, the church must abandon quietist conservatism, and make explicit God's command to the state.

Three years later, in the face of aggressive Nazism, Barth found it more urgent to find a positive connection between the church and the state, as well as a notion of the responsible church under such a totalitarian regime. For this reason, he extended his political thesis in another piece of work, *Church and State*, where he developed the concept of *intercession* to describe the normative link between the church and the state. As for the church, its authority

developed account of Law and Gospel formula is given in the section 36 "Ethics as a Task of the Doctrine of God", CD II.2, 509-542.

²⁷ Barth, *CSC*, 79-80, Italics in original.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

derives from a “priestly duty,” reminding the state of its just usage of power as guardian of the law and the common good. To be witness to the state implies being responsible to it and fulfilling the church’s civic duty, which is “responsible choices of authority, responsible decisions about the validity of laws, responsible care for their maintenance, in a word, political action, which may also mean political struggle.”³⁰ Barth further reminds us that, no matter how the state abuses its power, and even when it turns its role from protection to suppression, the church can never be its enemy by refusing to resist. Instead, he stressed that, in the criticism of the church, the state is honoured because the church itself is God’s instrument to save the state from its misuse of power. In resisting the unjust state, the church is being responsible to the state. “All this will be done, not against the state, but as the church’s service for the state! Respect for the authority of the state is indeed an annex to the priestly function of the church toward the state.”³¹ As for the state, since it also falls under the authority of God, it has a legitimate role as guardian, creating and sustaining earthly peace and justice, and serving the church by granting it its freedom to be the church. Barth comments,

Wherever this right (freedom) is recognised, and wherever a true Church makes the right use of it (and the free preaching of justification will see to it that things fall into their true place), there we shall find a legitimate human authority and an earthly legitimate human independence; tyranny on the one hand, and anarchy on the other. Fascism and Bolshevism alike will be dethroned; and the true order of human affairs—the justice, wisdom and peace, equality and care for human welfare which are necessary to that true order—will arise.³²

Indeed, the proper functioning of a just state is impossible without a witnessing church, and *vice versa*. In the course of intercession, they serve each other as witnesses to the kingdom of God. However, anytime the church seeks to replace the state, it becomes an “idolatrous church”, and when the state seeks to replace the church, i.e., demanding that its citizens worship the state, it also becomes an idolatrous “clerical state.”³³ In both deviated forms, they cease to be witnesses and fall under the judgement of God. This is the critical message Barth sent to the Christian communities under the threat of Nazi aggression in Germany, Switzerland, and

³⁰ Karl Barth, “Church and State,” in *CSC*, 114.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

³² *Ibid.*, 147-148.

³³ *Ibid.*, 132.

Czechoslovakia. Barth earnestly reminded them that in bearing witness to God's justification and acting in justice, these churches could still fulfil their true political mission as their priestly responsibility.³⁴

Concerning the nature and dynamic of this collective responsibility, Barth gave further details in his essay *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day*, which appeared in 1939. Such a responsibility, he said, is primarily the witness of the church, which is called from the Word of God with its three-fold content: prophecy, priesthood and Kingdom. Moreover, as Barth added, this responsibility as Christian witnesses also means a decision: a human decision responsible to the divine decision.

The Church of which we have spoken always exists wherever the call to the Church, coming through the Word of God itself, is issued and is heard. Where ever that happens—in the very midst of the hypocrites, the indifferent, the misleaders, and the misled—for Israel has always been all this—at that point there exists the people which has found its own comfort and hope and that of all the world in Jesus Christ, and its service in the world in witnessing to His prophecy, His Priesthood, and His Kingdom. But that this happens is always and everywhere a matter of decision; of a decision both divine and human, a decision of revelation and of faith. We shall do well in all that follows to remember that, when we are speaking of the Church, we are always speaking of this decision as well.³⁵

Barth thus develops the concept *actualisation of the confession* to grasp the practical and concrete characteristics of the responsible action of the church. The term stresses the nature of confession as a particular act which is made by the church at the present moment. It must be receptive to the Word and responsive to the world in real-life situations. Moreover, bearing witness to the world, especially the political world, does not imply that the church should speak *to* the situation but *in* the situation. It must not draw its speech and action from the spirit of the age, but speak to it and with it. In other words, the essence of its message must not be chosen or shaped by the character of the situation. It must hear the gospel first and foremost, and then become a definite reflection of it in the situation. As Barth explains, it is driven by its “inner necessity,” that is, the summons of the Word of God who alone identifies and answers real questions in the real world.

³⁴ Ibid., 138-139.

³⁵ Karl Barth, *CP*, 11.

It does this because this witnessing, here and now, at the present moment, can most certainly only possess form, tone and colour, and thus can only become audible, in its definite relationship to those questions which are agitating both the Church and the world here and now at the present moment. It certainly does not do this in relation to all—or, at all events, not in equal relation to all—the problems which from time to time are agitating Church and world. Not even does it do this in relation to all the questions which from time to time are known as “burning questions.” But it does do this in relation to those questions into whose area and province it sees itself summoned by its own course and by its own inner necessity, through the special responsibility which it has, not towards any kind of situation, but always in some particular situation, towards the special guidance of the Lord of the Church and towards the special witness of the living Holy Scriptures.³⁶

During post-war reconstruction, Barth published his third major piece of political work, the 1946 essay “The Christian Community and the Civil Community.” In this work, his theological politics of democratic socialism found its mature form in the concept of collective responsibility. Like his previous *Church and State*, here the central theme continued to be the normative roles and the relationship of the two communities. Theologically speaking, these two dynamic communities should be distinct and independent on the one hand; meanwhile, they are connected and hierarchically differentiated on the other.³⁷ The inner circle is the Christian community (church) because it bears the witness to the Word of God through hearing and obeying His revelation. The outer circle is the civil community (state) for it usually hears and follows other words, most of which are found in social and cultural identity. As the inner and outer circles, the two communities have the same centre: the kingdom of God in the revelation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. They are both His witnesses as distinct human communities. Moreover, it is the distance to the Word that defines their mutual relationships: the more proximity to the Word, the more responsibility held to the other. As Barth states, “The real church must be the model prototype of the real state.”³⁸ This implies that the church should remind the state of its true purpose, that is, to bring honour to God. To fulfil its priestly task, the church must not be politically indifferent:

³⁶ Ibid., 16.

³⁷ An insight from George Hunsinger. See George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 82-83.

³⁸ Karl Barth, “The Christian Community and the Civil Community,” *CSC*, 186.

However much human error and human tyranny may be involved in it, the State is not a product of sin but one of the constants of the divine Providence and government of the world in its action against human sin: it is there an instrument of divine grace. The civil community shares both a common origin and a common centre with the Christian community....Its existence is not separate from the Kingdom of Jesus Christ; its foundations and its influence are not autonomous. It is outside the Church but not outside the range of Christ's dominion—it is an exponent of His Kingdom....[This] makes one thing quite impossible, however: a Christian decision to be indifferent; a non-political Christianity. The Church can in no case be indifferent or neutral towards this manifestation of an order so clearly related to its own mission. Such indifference would be equivalent to the opposition of which it is said in Romans 13:2 that it is a rebellion against the ordinance of God—and rebels secure their own condemnation.³⁹

Beyond his earlier position, here Barth places greater emphasis on the activist role of the church in calling the state toward a specific political direction. Through its prayer, obedience and witness to the gospel, as well as its moral judgement and proclamation, the church “will choose and desire whichever seems to be the better political system in any particular situation, and in accordance with its choice and desire it will offer its support here and its resistance there.” Barth continues, “It is in the making of such distinctions, judgements, and choices from its own centre, and in the practical decision which necessarily flows from that centre, that the Christian community expresses its ‘subordination’ to the civil community and fulfils its share of political responsibility.”⁴⁰ In other words, by reminding the state of its ordained purpose and function, the church shows its commitment to its own political task as the witnessing church.

As the outer circle of human witness of the kingdom of God, the state grounds its authority as the just state when it seeks to balance the rights and responsibilities claimed by individuals and communities. It must be cautious of two political extremes, namely individualism and collectivism, for they will corrupt genuine human freedom and responsibility and lead the state into either anarchy or totalitarianism. In this way, they both deny the law which limits and protects human liberty. For Barth, it is this law with its two-fold function makes the state the guardian of a just and peaceful order. He calls this type the *just constitutional state* or *Reichstaat*. By its transcendent principles, the constitutional state protects and limits every citizen without exemption, while securing its authority from arbitrary judgements by dominant individuals or

³⁹ Ibid., 156-157.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 162-163.

communities. For this reason, Barth found the constitutional state preferable to other forms of political arrangements. Furthermore, for its proper functioning, two conditions need to be satisfied. First, civil law must be grounded in moral law, which means it must obey the command of God as the gracious command. To access this knowledge, it needs the witnessing church to remind it of its true centre and calling. Second, it must safeguard the making and application of just law. Thus, a three-fold system is necessary: “(a) legislation, which has to settle the legal system which is to be binding on all; (b) the government and administration which has to apply the legislation; (c) the administration of justice which has to deal with cases of doubtful or conflicting law and decide on its applicability.”⁴¹ Barth believes that, through the collaboration of legislative, executive and judicial agencies, the constitutional state can ground its institutional basis of preserving and safeguarding humanity in practice.

The genuinely innovative aspect of Barth’s political thesis is the twelve concrete examples of analogical practice which connect the Christian community and the civil community.⁴² Each analogy is deeply rooted in Christian doctrine, and the cornerstone of them all is the incarnation through which God chooses to stand with humanity. As Barth explains,

Since God Himself became man, man is the measure of all things, and man can and must only be used and, in certain circumstances, sacrificed, for man. Even the most wretched man—not man’s egoism, but man’s humanity—must be resolutely defended

⁴¹ Ibid., pp.150-151.

⁴² Similar analogies first appeared in Barth’s earlier *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day*: “There are many points in the life of the Christian Church seen in the light of which cooperation in the restoration and preservation of the just State—not as the Anabaptists thought, the establishment and defence of a Kingdom of God on earth—becomes a task which those who in all seriousness will be Christians cannot evade. Here I can only indicate the connections: If the Church’s form of life is the congregation as the communion of believers in an earthly body under a heavenly Head—One is your master, and yet are all brethren!—then it is inconceivable how, in the light of this, a form of life corresponding to this her own form could fail to be sought in the political area as well. Further: if the faith of the Church is the faith which believes that God intervenes on behalf of sinful man, as a poor man to whom God by His own agency sees justice done, then he who so believes will as such be summoned to recognize a parable of his own need before God in every situation where he bears human crying out for human justice. And he will also be summoned—and again, as in a parable of that for which he himself has God to thank—to make, as his cause, the service of setting up and preserving human right and human justice. Further: where the freedom of the children of God is really proclaimed and believed, there the confidence must prevail that even the earthly external ordering of human affairs is best carried out if it appeals to the free man instead of taking freedom away from man. Further: where prayer is made for lawful authority, as should be done by the Christian congregation, according to the New Testament, every single praying Christian openly assumes his own share of responsibility for the existence of a lawful authority. Does all this mean a Christian glorifying and absolutizing of democracy? I think not. All that has been said could apply to an ordinary monarchy, but certainly not to tyranny or anarchy. How anyone, coming from the faith and life of the Christian Church, could consent to tyranny and anarchy or approve of it or wish it or actively take part in it is beyond comprehension.” Barth, *CP*, 74-76.

against the autocracy of every mere “cause.” Man has not to serve causes; causes have to serve man.⁴³

On this ground, the civil community should protect human dignity in concrete situations and not be led astray by abstract rules or causes. Barth continues by formulating other analogies which firmly unite the two communities according to the vision of democratic socialism. Second, since the church is the witness to divine justification, it will always urge the civil community to establish just law to limit and preserve the humanity of all. Thus, it will stand for the constitutional state and against its degeneration into tyranny and anarchy. Third, since the church gives witness to the fact that Jesus Christ came to seek and save the lost, it must stand for social justice in the political sphere. Thus, it will always insist on the political responsibility of the civil community for its weaker members. Moreover, as Barth emphasises, “And in choosing between the various socialistic possibilities (social-liberalism? Co-operativism? Syndicalism? Free trade? Moderate or radical Marxism?) it will always choose the movement from which it can expect the greatest measure of social justice (leaving all other considerations on one side).”⁴⁴ Fourth, since the church is the fellowship of free people called by the Word of God, it must affirm the basic political, social and religious rights of every citizen living in the civil community. Thus, it will always reject any form of practical dictatorship, which is most evident in totalitarian or authoritarian states. Fifth, since the church is the Christian community of one Head, that is the Lord Christ, it must associate its right-claims of individual citizens with their political responsibility. It thus has good reason to surpass radical individualism and collectivism and subordinate them to the well-being of individuals and the community before the law. Sixth, since the church is made of equal members based on baptism in one Holy Spirit, it must support equal liberty and responsibility in the political sphere. Thus, it will always reject any state which discriminates against its citizens on the basis of race, class, gender, or religious belief.

Seventh, since the church is established by the diversity of the gifts and tasks of the Spirit, it will welcome the state’s separation of powers. In such a civil community where different persons perform different functions and services, its nature as a common enterprise will be apparent. In this matter, the church will lead the state. Eighth, since the church lives from the revelation of Jesus Christ as the light dawning on the world and as the destroyer of darkness, it must be the enemy of all secret policies. Thus, it will always press the state—the legislator, the

⁴³ Barth, “The Christian Community the Civil Community,” 171-172.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 173.

ruler and the judge—to be publicly responsible to its citizens in all actions. Ninth, since the church is nourished by the free Word of God, it must treat the human word as a free and capable tool of this Word in the political sphere. Therefore, it will do its best to create opportunities for interactive discussion in the civil community as the basis of common endeavours and refuse any attempt to control or censor public opinion. Tenth, since the members of the church as disciples of Christ serve rather than rule, it should discern the ways the state uses its power; only the power that follows and serves the law is praiseworthy. In contrast, the state which prefers naked power above the law deserves violence and even extinction. Eleventh, since the church is ecumenical by virtue of its origin, it should resist all kinds of exclusive political interests at local, regional and national levels. Moreover, it should support the civil community to relativize its political boundaries and be as inclusive as possible. Finally, since the church knows that the God of judgement is also the God of mercy, it must remind the state that it may appeal to violent methods only as a last resort and only as a necessary means for peace.

In the course of formulating these crucial analogies, Barth sought an original Christian approach to political witness. As he admits, his list remains incomplete and needs to be extended, deepened and particularized. It offers merely a few examples of responsible Christian decisions and actions in the political sphere.⁴⁵ Indeed, the promising translation of the Word of God into political terms requires spiritual and prophetic witness on both sides. The more concrete an analogy, the more effectively it directs the Christian gospel to historical and individual decisions. In practice, through its free witness of the divine Word of God, the church makes itself responsible for the shape and reality of the civil community. Most importantly, far from random and momentary judgements, Barth clearly shows a constant theological concern of establishing and sustaining a peaceful, loving and just political order to safeguard human freedom, equality and responsibility. For him, it is *this* spirit of the common life through which the church is responsible for the broader civil community. Besides, he also reminds us, such a political order is external, relative and provisional. Thus, even the most desirable vision is not equal to a divine form of government. Meanwhile, Barth is also cautious of another temptation: treating all political systems the same way. Not all cats are grey! In sum, within its own qualifications and limitations, the constitutional state, with its strong emphasis on social justice, is the best answer for Barth. He concludes, “on the whole toward the form of State, which, if not actually realised in the so-called democracies, is at any rate more or less honestly clearly intended and desired.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid., 179-180.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 182.

Such a vision of the responsible church in democratic socialism became concrete in Barth's political discernment in the same period. Different from his decisive rejection of National Socialism in the 1930s, now Barth chose to separate the ideals and practice of communism, arguing for the just factors within the regime. Against the background of the upcoming Cold War, unsurprisingly, his position attracted much criticism from allies such as Emil Brunner.⁴⁷ However, these Barth critics in no small degree misunderstood him, failing to appreciate the prophetic vision and strength in his argument. As Barth cautions, one must discriminate between the totalitarian atrocities of communism and the positive intentions behind them. For him, it is simply absurd to equal the Marxist philosophy with the ideology of the Third Reich, for the latter is the product of madness and crime. It also makes little sense to mention Joseph Stalin in the same tone with Hitler, Hess and other Nazi charlatans, although both had dirty and bloody hands in their political projects. The very reason that led Barth to make such distinction was a critical and burning issue which troubled both West and East: the problem of social justice, one of the critical concerns of democratic socialism. When this problem is taken seriously, Barth concedes, there is some truth in Communist accusations against Western democracies: "But do not let us forget that the East, as we have already heard, also accuses us of inhumanity, the inhumanity of our intentions, and charges us with a mode of thinking and feeling basically corrupted by our appalling respect for material values; charges us not only with hard deeds, but also with hardheartedness."⁴⁸ Therefore, he urges the church in the West not to join in the popular but false accusations, because they are subject to one-sided blindness and hypocrisy. The church surely must defend itself against the godless belief of the East and hold its ground in Christian faith and steadfastness. But this insistence has nothing to do with political partisanship or religious crusade. What the western church owes to the godless East is not such things but the Word of the Cross, for only *that* Word can rebuild the church and the world afresh. To the church which was oppressed and persecuted under the Communist regime, Barth also suggests a more responsible way than merely raising protests or issuing summons to political or religious warfare, as those in the West would do. For him, something quite different is required for the responsible church, that is, the "patience and faith of the saint," a combination of joyful perseverance and fearless profession. In a courageous and hopeful tone, he expects that:

⁴⁷ See the open letter from Brunner to Barth and Barth's reply, in Karl Barth, *AS*, 106-117.

⁴⁸ Karl Barth, "The Church between East and West," *Cross Currents* 2 (1951), 72.

If the Church achieves that, she stands on a rock; she can laugh at the whole godless movement and whether they hear it or not—one day they will hear it—she has something positive to say to the godless. In fact, if she has the Gospel to confess, she has not merely the philosophy and morality of the West, not a religious disguise in the place of real life, not a mere injunction to escape into the inner life of the spirit or into heaven, no imaginary, but the living God and his Kingdom, the crucified and risen Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour of the whole man.⁴⁹

With such a political vision in mind, now we can move to Barth's concrete proposal on the practical virtues in their dialectic forms.

The last political work of Barth worth mentioning is his "Political Decisions in the Unity of the Faith" published in 1952. Here he suggests five pairs of virtues in the course of political deliberation and decision-making. The first pair is *faithful obedience* and *reflexive examination*. On the one hand, the Christian has to deal with the problem of obedience in his political reasoning, evaluation and judgement. To do justice to this problem, he cannot pretend to be neutral but must answer it in one specific direction. In this way, being obedient to his faith means accepting that fact that he himself is "called and constrained to make a concrete political decision and to stand by his decision, to defend it publicly and to summon other Christians (and non-Christians!) at all costs to take the same decision (since God, known or unknown, is the God of them all)."⁵⁰ The reasons for such a determination is both rational and spiritual. As Barth demonstrates,

The Christian who is aware of his political responsibility will, like his fellow-citizens, take the individual political arguments as such with the utmost seriousness. He will realise that the questions he has to answer are questions of judgement and—in the world of Kant—he must have "the courage to use his own mind."

He continues,

But he will differ from his non-Christian fellow-citizens inasmuch as he will give heed to the spirits that speak in the two series of arguments and to the trains of thought, trends and visions that are to be perceived in them. The Bible does say at least that in

⁴⁹ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁰ Karl Barth, "Political Decisions in the Unity of the Faith," *AS*, 154.

the events of the age, small and great, the Christian has to reckon with the dominion of spirits, different spirits, good and evil spirits, and that, led by the Holy Spirit of the Word of God and measuring them by His standard, he has to discern the spirits and adjust his own attitude to this spiritual discernment: not in one way or another but in one way and *not* another.⁵¹

On the other hand, the Christian must not deceive herself by thinking that her choice or decision made in faithful obedience can be adopted unexamined by others. For Barth, it is a grave mistake to take full control of one's decision and regard oneself as exempt from the burden of responsibility. That is, testifying openly and earnestly to one's faith and the decision made in line with that faith, listening freely and humbly to the testimony of other members of the community.⁵² Instead of criticizing, groaning and being supersensitive about a troubled conscience, Barth invites the Christian to examine herself and be grateful for others' responses regardless of whether the decision will persist in the end. In this dialectic, self-examination is far from an obstacle to making decisions obedient to faith, but rather an indispensable safeguard which makes decisions obedient and faithful to the Word of God.

The second pair consists of *political sobriety* and *theological insightfulness*, which is also demanded by sound political decisions. The former is crucial when Christians select the material factors to consider and make sense of their actual relationships. This is a practical virtue to understand the history and reality they face. The latter is even more vital, for it helps Christians to view these materials and their connections as a whole from a transcendent perspective, that is, the kingdom of God revealed and actualised in the divine work of Jesus Christ. The same insight will also inject a spiritual instinct for Christians to discern the relative values of each side of the case and to have a keen perception of the good and the harm of the conflicting factors in the situation. As Barth argues, "A political decision is unlikely to be successful without a good deal of simple common sense and a spark of prophecy—or rather, without something of the urgent and all-seeing love of Christ."⁵³ The third pair is *loyalty* and *toleration*. First, loyalty to the whole community always motivates the advocates of the political decision—usually a few individuals among many others—if they expect to attain a consensus on their way to the common good. It thus should be articulated to their suspicious listeners and accepted by them before they express concerns, reservations or even criticisms. Meanwhile, the words and deeds

⁵¹ Ibid., 153. Italics in original.

⁵² Ibid., 158.

⁵³ Ibid., 159.

of the few individuals also call for tremendous tolerance from their fellow Christians. These others must be open-minded during a political discussion and be slow to blame their opponents, whether they quote from the Bible or abandon religious vocabulary and theological reasoning. In brief, the virtue of tolerance testifies to the loyalty of political advocates and their stands, and seeks the best to maintain the unity of their faith in community.⁵⁴

Making responsible and fruitful decisions requires both *courage* and *humility*, the fourth pair. Many times, engaging in politics is a dangerous but necessary enterprise; even those who risk themselves in pursuing noble causes have to face huge uncertainties of success and failure. The virtue of courage helps those involved in such an endeavour search for earthly hope in the light of the divine promise, utter a political direction in obedience to the command of God, and move forward by taking even a small step in trust and certainty of His providence. As a virtue of profound self-knowledge, humility reminds the Christian of the feebleness, temporariness and relativity intrinsic to her desires and accomplishments. It also reminds her that glory, wisdom and power belong only to God himself, that she is merely a witness to His kingdom. Yet when she accepts this knowledge, she “does not cease, in and with this knowledge, to be courageous, to speak and act with definiteness and resolution.”⁵⁵ For him, whenever this dialectic is made clear, the Christian testimony to political decisions will be intelligible and sensible. The last pair of virtues is *joyfulness* and *severity*. Joyfulness is grounded in the gospel and the associated belief in the reconciliation of humanity and the world with God which has been accomplished in Jesus Christ. It is the liberating power in the spring of Christian witness which frees themselves and all others. Neither ideology nor system can enslave this joyfulness from within. Severity is rooted in God’s covenant and His people and the firm knowledge of His absolute, just and gracious commandment. As the committed and committing servants of God, Christians must be bound to each other in mutual strictness and constraining power. Otherwise, they cannot make any valid claim on others, and their witness will be useless to the will of God.⁵⁶

Taken as a whole, these virtues are the key components of responsible Christian action in the political arena. If democratic socialism is the political vision for Barth, then these dialectically patterned virtues are the constants of that vision. Without their critical function, political talk of responsibility will be hollow, political visions will be unrealistic and, most importantly, political decisions will be capricious and delinquent, lacking the power of faithful

⁵⁴ Ibid., 160.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 160.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 162.

witness. After all, genuine responsible actions are not guided by principles but exemplified in specific political decisions: “What a strange kind of responsibility before God it would be which was only allowed to take place in the form of an empty recognition of the principle of responsibility, but never—or only in the “exceptional case”—in the shape of concretely responsible political decisions!”⁵⁷ Barth, as a devoted religious socialist, not only spoke this message but also lived it out in his lifelong but constant political engagement. In his responsible words and deeds, Barth enriched the moral dimension of democratic socialism. This was his overarching contribution to the political tradition and to the democratic movement at large. The whole picture is distorted when we consider only his critical comments on a few figures in his early career and thus fail to recognise his corrective efforts for the movement. His legacy is underestimated if we focus only on his belief system and neglect concrete political visions and virtues. Far beyond doctrinal narrowness or abstractness, Barth’s engagement and contribution to democratic socialism still bears Christian witness in its most concrete and comprehensive form.

5.3 Mou Zongsan: Social Democracy as the way to state building

Mou Zongsan’s encounter with Social Democracy happened after he became a committed Confucian intellectual. The key figures who had a substantial impact on him were Zhang Junmai and Zhang Dongsun. In the intellectual sphere after the May Fourth Movement, both thinkers chose to be advocates of Confucian tradition and progressive politics.⁵⁸ Such a position separated them from the mainstream, especially from liberals and Marxists. For the liberals, democracy is the key component of modernization,⁵⁹ and the political model they suggested was Western parliamentary democracy. However, the same model was under fierce criticism by the Marxists, who labelled it “capitalist democracy”. Following the example of the Soviet Union, they preferred populist democracy, which was closely associated with proletarian dictatorship. Still, despite these rival understandings of democracy, the liberals and Marxists shared an opposition to the Confucian tradition, despising it as the primary obstacle to

⁵⁷ Ibid., 164.

⁵⁸ See Chapter 1 for the intellectual background since the 1920s. For the major political works by the two figures before 1949, see Weng Hekai, ed., *Chinese Modern Thinker Series: Zhang Junmai* (Beijing: Renmin University Press, 2014) and Zuo Yuhe, ed., *Chinese Modern Thinker Series: Zhang Dongsun* (Beijing: Renmin University Press, 2015).

⁵⁹ Another component is science. See Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

modernization.⁶⁰ Against these schools, both Zhang Junmai and Zhang Dongsun argued that Confucianism does not conflict with democracy; moreover, it has an intrinsic demand for it. Unsurprisingly, the brevity and intellectual sincerity of this unique position attracted young Mou Zongsan. In 1935, at the behest of Zhang Dongsun, Mou joined the new National Socialist Party, which was led by Zhang Junmai. Mou soon caught the eye of the party leader, who then nominated him to be the chief editor of the party's official mouthpiece, *Renaissance*. During the same period, Mou published a series of articles to explain and defend the political vision of Social Democracy. The following statements clearly show his political identity and agenda for the future of modern China:

The political chaos of the last several decades has not been utterly useless. Because of it, China has not followed the path of capitalism and, therefore, does not demand a proletarian revolution. The only solution is National Socialism. The reason that we call it “national” is that what is vertical (state) must break through what is horizontal (class). Modern states all take people or nation as their units. Even the Soviet Union is no exception. Without the motherland and borders, people may have a proletariat mentality, but such a mentality is still conditional and inferior to the mentality of nationalism. In the distant future, a brilliant ideal world may come; however, the present reality—especially the reality of China—must not allow this harmful discourse to emerge. Since China has not taken the capitalist road, its industrial development is still backward. The urgent agenda for the present is nothing but production. And the production is not that of the capitalist kind; it rather eliminates the pernicious influences of capitalism by means of state power. That is to say, it is a kind of public production rather than private production. This is the necessity of National Socialism. Even Soviet Russia has a national socialist system, though accompanied by one-party dictatorship. Therefore, a country with backward industries which does not follow the capitalist road must take the path of National Socialism. If China wants to get rid of its sub-colonial status, if it is determined to do so, this is the only way.⁶¹

Almost a half-century later, though Mou Zongsan still held the same convictions, he distinguished Social Democracy from its deviant, communism. For this established Confucian

⁶⁰ Lee Ming-Huei, *Confucianism and Modern Consciousness*, 1-2.

⁶¹ Mou Zongsan, “Reconstructing the Current Society in Accordance with the Development of Social Forms,” in *EW II.*, 736. Emphasis in original.

philosopher, only Social Democracy was a noble political enterprise worthy of life-long dedication. And it was the only political vision he held for his motherland.

I am often asked by some people about the Communist Party ruling China with Marxism-Leninism for more than thirty years, and Chinese culture suffering unprecedented devastation and distortion. If the mainland and Taiwan cannot be unified in a rational way in the short term, can Marxism be absorbed by the Chinese culture as a sideline like Buddhism? I think it depends on the angle through which we examine Marxism. If seen as a Bolshevik ideology inherited from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, then Marxism cannot become a sideline of Chinese culture. It cannot be absorbed by Chinese culture as a sideline like Buddhism. It is an absolute antithesis to Chinese culture. We must eliminate it completely for it is an absolute evil. If [Marxism] is seen as a specific form of socialism, it can become a sideline of Chinese culture as Buddhism. There is a tendency for socialism in Chinese culture. A considerable degree of socialism is allowed. The principles of the People's Livelihood (*minsheng zhuyi*, 民生主义) in the Three People's Principles have a considerable degree of socialism. The nations of the world also have socialists, like the British Labour Party. But socialism is completely different from communism. The Communist Party is the most disgusted with socialism on the one hand, and it exploits socialism by advocating a Communist version of socialism on the other. Most people are ignorant and are thus vulnerable to be deceived. Socialism in a specific form must admit the free economy and a certain degree of private ownership. Therefore, socialism consists of land-to-the-tiller, regulation of capital, social insurance and so forth, because they can promote social welfare. Communism is not socialism, for it can only create disasters.⁶²

Behind these statements lay Mou's deep convictions about National Socialism, learned from Zhang Junmai. For Zhang, the term "National Socialism" was a scandal in Germany, but not in China. Replying to some suspicions, Zhang distinguished German Nazism from the Chinese version of National Socialism to which he himself adhered. The critical difference, he argued, was that Nazism takes the racial and cultural superiority of the Aryan Volk as its vision and the annihilation of all its enemies as its political objective, while the urgent needs of China were the survival of the emerging nation-state and the maintenance of peace and order. For him,

⁶² Mou Zongsan, "The Ultimate Concern of Chinese Cultural Mainstream," in *TF* I, 433-434.

the two objectives of state-building are the political integrity of the state and the free development of every citizen. Therefore, the practical concern of National Socialism in the Chinese context is to promote democratic governance and resist one-party dictatorship.⁶³ During the First World War, Zhang studied politics in Germany, visiting the legal scholar (and the father of the Weimar Constitution) Hugo Preuss (1860-1925) and leading social democratic intellectuals such as Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932), Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) and Philipp Scheidemann (1865-1939). When he came back to China, Zhang started to introduce ideas from the German social democratic movement and, more importantly, proposed an agenda for political reform from the social democratic perspective.⁶⁴ According to him, the essence of socialism is common ownership. If the essential materials (such as land) can be owned and managed by the public, with the benefits can be fairly distributed to and shared by the public, the economic functions of socialism will be recognisable.⁶⁵ The political infrastructure corresponding to such an economic system is a constitutional democracy, taking as one of its supreme principles the equality of all people before the law. Another principle is that all citizens have equal voting rights regardless of wealth, race or religion. In other words, genuine democracy can exist only in a formal system.⁶⁶ This allowed Zhang to save the political vision of Social Democracy from both revolutionary Marxism and racist Nazism, for both proved to be antidemocratic by imposing a one-party dictatorship. Therefore, it would be a disaster for the Chinese people if they followed either Communist Russia or Nazi Germany in formulating their political-economic system.⁶⁷ Instead, a more sensible option would be engaging in party politics to achieve continuous and incremental reform informed by the social democratic vision.

Zhang Junmai did not fight alone. His friend Zhang Dongsun shared the same vision. As a philosopher, journalist and political activist, Zhang also stood against any form of anti-constitutional and anti-democratic politics. This led him to seek a third way between the authoritarian rule of the KMT and the violent resistance of the CCP. The two Zhangs thus fought shoulder-to-shoulder on the intellectual and political battlefields. As early as 1923, they participated in the great debate on Science and the Philosophy of Life. Their strong defence of the Confucian tradition as a robust worldview attracted many college students, including Mou

⁶³ Zhang Junmai, *The Way of State Building* (Shanghai: Headquarter of China Democratic Socialist Party, 1946), preface, 2.

⁶⁴ Zhang Junmai, *Social Democracy in New Germany* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1922). See also Weng Hekai, "The Origin of the Democratic Socialist Thought of Zhang Junmai," *Twenty-First Century* 8 (2008), 60-69.

⁶⁵ Zhang Junmai, *Social Democracy in New Germany*, 309-313.

⁶⁶ For a concise introduction of major types of democracy see "Democracy," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/democracy/>.

⁶⁷ Zhang Junmai, "The Future of China: Germany? Russia?" *Transformation* 2, no. 14 (1920): 8.

Zongsan.⁶⁸ A decade later, Zhang Dongsun helped Zhang Junmai found the National Socialist Party as a only democratic force against the two main parties.⁶⁹ He also became the first chief editor of *Renaissance*, a position in which he was succeeded by Mou. During the 1930s, especially before the invasion of Japan, Zhang spoke and wrote as the primary advocate of a planned economy, which largely shaped the national discussion about the reform agenda. In his polemic article “Production Planning and Production Mobilization”, Zhang argued that while socialized production under the planning system was initiated by the Soviet Union, it was common to many countries which wanted to escape from economic depression and get rid of unbridled capitalism.⁷⁰ China does not need to be exceptional, he said, if it is willing to learn some concrete lessons. Against many admirers of the Soviet model, however, he rejected its rule by terror and radical nationalization as inhumane and unjust. Zhang also saw the intellectual foundations of these Communist strategies—historical materialism and class struggle—as extremely questionable. As the vanguard of the proletariat class, the Communist party operated as the engine of public production and accumulation; meanwhile, it deliberately created a uniform society by gradually eliminating other classes. The economic success of the Soviet model was founded on these brutal methods, under one-party dictatorship. In this way, the so-called proletariat dictatorship comes into being not only in name but also in reality; both a constitution and democracy thus become useless, even harmful to the endeavour. Compared to Communist Russia, Zhang said, the Chinese situation was even more miserable. For decades, rampant warlords, bandits and corrupted officials had consumed the whole country and impeded any effort at peace-making and public production. As the leading progressive force, however, the KMT upheld constitutional democracy only in name, hesitating to relinquish its dominant rule.⁷¹ Even worse, the party diligently obstructed grassroots autonomy and constrained freedom of speech to secure the current status quo. As Zhang concluded, with such notorious misconduct, how can a party take responsibility for economic mobilization by setting an example for the whole society?⁷² In his final judgment, national development demands organised public production under constitutional order. Unless new alternative forces with virtue and wisdom emerge and take the lead, progress seems impossible.

⁶⁸ See Chapter 2.

⁶⁹ The National Socialist Party was founded in Tianjin in July 1934. The first Central Committee included eleven members who elected Zhang Junmai to be the general secretary.

⁷⁰ Zhang Dongsun, “Production Planning and Production Mobilization,” *Renaissance* 2 (1932): 1.

⁷¹ According to Sun Yat-sen, political tutelage was an intermediate stage of the constitutional building for China. For the full text of his political blueprint see Sun Yat-sen, “Fundamentals of National Reconstruction,” *Selected Works of Sun Yat-sen Vol. II*, ed. Huang Yan (Guangzhou: Guangdong People’s Publishing House, 2006).

⁷² Zhang Dongsun, “Production Planning and Production Mobilization,” 13-14.

It is thus enough to say that, if Zhang Junmai clarified the political vision of Social Democracy, Zhang Dongsun articulated the economic blueprint of that vision. As a junior party member and their political disciple, Mou Zongsan learned these insights and inherited their passion for Social Democracy. Furthermore, compared to his predecessors, Mou spent more energy on connecting the political and economic endeavour of Social Democracy with the related responsible actions informed by the Confucian tradition, demonstrating that in the combination the two components can be mutually reinforced. As Mou's successive works illustrate, the critical components of democratic socialism gradually found their proper roots in the Confucian tradition according to its moral insights.

The first element of Social Democracy to which Mou paid attention in his early years was a *mixed economy*, i.e., with capitalist and socialist components. In his 1934 article "Reconstructing the Current Society in Accordance with the Development of Social Forms," he responded to the critical concern raised by Zhang and suggested a comprehensive agenda for the planned economy. For Mou, establishing a national planned economy required extraordinary wisdom and effort. But the first item on the agenda was to make clear several practical points of guidance. First, large-scale industries beyond the capacity of individuals should be operated by the state in order to eliminate capitalist forms of exploitation. Second, some forms of private ownership of the land (land-to-the-tiller) must be affirmed by the law. Meanwhile, comprehensive nationalization must be rejected. Third, free enterprise and business must also be permitted. Fourth, unproductive groups (vagrants, monks, squires and dandies) should be eliminated.⁷³ In a subsequent article addressing rural reform, he further elaborated the limits of the two mechanisms. In economic areas where private production does not cause extreme wealth and poverty, a capitalist mode of production should be allowed and encouraged. But where private production is either beyond individual capacity or may cause tremendous polarization, a socialist mode of production should replace the capitalist one. This implies that socialism, as a way to correct unbridled capitalism, has a distinctly moral dimension. Its practical form is the planned economy, which can effectively overcome capitalist overproduction and class conflicts.⁷⁴ Therefore, under the planning system of the state, a collaboration of socialism and capitalism can be achieved. The moral reason for this unity, as Mou deliberates, lies in the deep roots of humanity:

⁷³ Mou Zongsan, "Reconstructing the Current Society in Accordance with the Development of Social Forms," 737.

⁷⁴ Mou Zongsan, "What is the Way of Reviving the Countryside?" *EW* II, 774-775. See also Zhang Junmai's comparison of capitalism and socialism in *The Way of State Building*, 227-228.

It must be noted that socialism emerges to save capitalism. Capitalism, in its essence, is also based on rationality: the individual, free, competitive, each doing what she can and earn what she deserves, and not having one's benefits robbed; however, sometimes the game may cause unfair results, and the so-called unfairness contradicts moral law ... We can say that the rationality of capitalism is natural rationality, while the rationality of socialism is normative rationality. The former is scientific, while the latter is moral. The former is a natural trend, while the latter is derived from human conscience. The former is animal, while the latter is divine. The former is morally irrelevant, while the latter is morally relevant. The former is laissez-faire, while the latter is constrained. Socialism means something to be constrained. Socialism is meant to constrain the abuses of capitalism. This era is the era of constraining, that is, the era in which everything to be regulated according to human ideals.⁷⁵

One year later, Mou Zongsan published his article "Two Types of Chinese Statesman" to discuss the traditional form of Chinese politics and the prospects for its reform. In this critical work, he sought a cure for the longstanding disease in the political tradition, suggesting *plural party politics* as a promising solution. This was the second time he researched the key elements of Social Democracy. In his diagnosis, the traditional system was marked by bureaucratic elitism under an absolute monarchy. Since political power was monopolized by the emperor and a small group of intellectual bureaucrats, ordinary people could never share the rights and responsibilities of governance. For this reason, power struggles always took place on the top of the pyramid; the most popular strategy was manoeuvring among various political groupings. One of the negative consequences of such a political structure is the endless cycling of order and chaos (*zhiluan xunhuan*, 治乱循环). The same structure also created two major types of statesmen: moralists and pragmatists.⁷⁶ The first type was the mainstream; whose primary concern was the person. Moral education and personal attacks were their favourite tools. The second type was the minority, concerned with the institution and its development. To make sound policies and launch genuine reforms, they usually had to be brave and innovative, but meanwhile utilitarian, deviant and ruthless. Unsurprisingly, the usual fate awaiting these figures was marginalization, prosecution or even execution. For Mou, only these "misery pragmatists", such as Shang Yang (商鞅, 390-338 BCE), Wang Anshi (王安石, 1021-86) and Zhang Juzheng

⁷⁵ Mou Zongsan, "What is the Way of Reviving the Countryside?" 773-774.

⁷⁶ Mou Zongsan, "Two Types of Chinese Statemen," *EW* II, 845.

(张居正, 1525-82) can be counted as genuine statesmen, although they failed to reform the ruling class or the political system.⁷⁷ To make change, Mou argues, a constitutional democracy must be established. As the foundations of this new political system, the state must affirm that the public is responsible for public affairs, and citizens have the right to freely express their ideas, as well as the rights of voting and being elected. The engine which makes all these work together is political parties, because only parties can actualise the political rights of citizens on the one hand and encourage their political engagement on the other. Moreover, a sound party politics must be plural. Since social and economic interests are diverse, party competition and collaboration are not only inevitable but also necessary. As the representatives of diverse interest groups, the existence of multiple political parties and their contestation under the constitution can achieve the common good. By contrast, the one-party rule of the 1930s did not respect the state nor the citizens; the KMT, as the dominant party, surpassed the state and trespassed against its people. It was instead a modern variant of absolute monarchy, with the ruler no longer an individual but an organisation.⁷⁸ Mou deepened this prophetic criticism in his other writings, where he called for resisting the party state as well as the numerous party bureaucrats and revolutionaries it created. He saw it as the responsibility of every critical intellectual to make every effort to save the nascent democratic tradition.⁷⁹

In the subsequent decade, Mou Zongsan witnessed the war against the Japanese, the civil war, and the demise of the Republican government. The failure of the Social Democratic Party to save the country from organised violence disappointed the middle-aged philosopher and led him finally to decide to quit the party.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, political adversity stimulated rather than prevented his political reflections. During this period, he published a famous trilogy of political studies, offering a compelling analysis of the Confucian tradition and modern democracy.⁸¹ His social democratic vision was further developed in the 1952 book titled *A Critique of the Communist International and the Chinese Communist Party*. In contemporary scholarship, this small book is still largely ignored.⁸² For us, however, its value derives from the fact that this work contains Mou's exploration of the third element: the *constitutional state* with its moral foundation in Confucianism. In other words, a Confucian vision for Social Democracy started to take shape. As Mou believes, any kind of human enterprise, including the political enterprise,

⁷⁷ Ibid., 846-849.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 857-858.

⁷⁹ Mou Zongsan, "How to Cultivate Statesmen," *EW II*, 865.

⁸⁰ After a reorganisation in 1946, the former National Socialist Party changed its name to be the China Democratic Socialist Party.

⁸¹ See Chapter 1.

⁸² Peng Guoxiang, *Practical Concerns of a Saint*, 274.

must be rooted in the moral substance of humanity and be guided by those ideals. This moral substance and its actualisation are constant themes for Confucian thinkers. It might be called “proper nature” (Mencius) or “innate knowledge” (Wang Yangming), but regardless of terminology, they all agreed on the transcendental characteristics of moral substance which prevails in human moral actions in the form of filial piety, mercy, respect, and benevolence. Mou thus indicates the same substance as the transcendental character of humanity (*tianli de renxing*, 天理的人性).⁸³ This real substance, he insists, is the origin of all values and ideals. The existence of this substance must not be denied or erased in principle. Its core cannot be interpreted or even replaced by concepts such as class or economic forces. Whenever people venture to these dangerous tasks, like the Communists did in China and other places, the meaning of Confucianism will be distorted, and its work will be abandoned. In contrast to these mistakes, Confucianism holds that this substance can be actualised only in various forms of communal life and enterprises.⁸⁴ This fundamental insight must also inform the enterprise of state-building.

While Confucianism provides an ethical foundation for the noble enterprise, it is not enough on its own to provide comprehensive guidance. As Mou critically comments,

Confucianism in China used to talk only about benevolence and righteousness from the perspectives of personal cultivation and familial piety. This is insufficient. Benevolence and righteousness must first be objectified to the state affairs, freedom and democracy, humanity and personality, ideals and values, history and culture, and then it can have definite meanings and scopes and become the leading progressive principle of the time.⁸⁵

According to him, traditional Confucian teachings are primarily concerned about the five key human relationships (*wulun*, 五伦) and about rectifying them in accordance with moral principles. These key relationships are between father and son, king and minister, husband and wife, senior and junior brothers, and between friends.⁸⁶ However, Confucians usually have an uneven emphasis, for three of the five relationships are related to familial piety, while only one

⁸³ Mou Zongsan, *CC*, 8. The term is invented by Mou himself. English translation is suggested by the author. For the source and background of this book, see Peng Guoxiang, *Practical Concerns of a Saint*, 272-278.

⁸⁴ Mou, *CC*, 9.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁶ These relationships are discussed extensively in many Confucian classics, including *Zhong Yong* (《中庸》), *Mengzi* (《孟子》) and Zhu Xi's *Four Books of Notes to Sentences* (《四书章句集注》).

(king and minister) is associated with state governance. Even so, Mou tends to see it as a humble but positive starting point. Following Mencius, he stresses that only according to the principle of justice – the pursuit of the common good – is a minister obligated to serve his king. Then true collaboration can happen, and sound leadership of the political community can be established. However, this moral principle was often undermined in practice because the personal relationship between the king and his ministers was subject to various temptations such as distrust, caprice, abuse and corruption. Borrowing Hegelian terminology, Mou argues that the *objectification* of this moral principle is incomplete in the traditional forms of governance. The establishment of modern constitutional democratic states changed this situation: in a constitutional democracy, there are institutional arrangements to guarantee popular sovereignty. Sovereignty is thus not monopolized by kings and their descendants but sustained and protected by democratic institutions. Also, such a state is ruled by a constitution legislated by the general public for the common good. In this light, the democratic institutions and constitution, as the products of human spirit and reason, embody the principle of justice and actualise it in the political enterprise.⁸⁷ They are the political extensions of Confucian idealism.

During the Cold War, Mou stood between the rival political camps in the West and the East and continued to argue for democratic causes. Such intellectual persistence in the age of extremes helped him identify the last and the key component of Social Democracy: *the moral ideal of universal human liberty*. In one of his lectures on humanities in 1956, he explained to his students that,

Confucius, Mencius, and the Song-Ming Confucians often talked about awakening and self-determination. It of course included their concerns of personality and freedom. But it was in the moral sense and was subjective freedom (主观自由), so it was possible to cultivate saints. It was not objective freedom (客观自由); thus it did not open the horizons of modern politics.⁸⁸

Here Mou distinguishes two categories of freedom, objective and subjective. He defines the former as the absence of interference and freedom to pursue whatever ends one sees fit, while the latter is closer to a Kantian conception of autonomy, action based on moral imperatives. Conceptually speaking, genuine human liberty contains these two kinds of freedom which

⁸⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁸ Mou Zongsan, "Discussion on the Issues of Chinese and Western Thoughts," in *LH*, 165.

support each other: subjective freedom provides a case for objective freedom, which would otherwise be based on nothing but air, while objective freedom expands and completes subjective freedom by providing an environment in which it can be realised. It can be said that, in the field of political philosophy, Mou's conceptions (as outlined above) are inherited from Hegel, while he injects strong moral meaning into Hegel's political concepts.⁸⁹ This unique usage is very similar to that of Isaiah Berlin, who develops the concepts of positive and negative freedom.⁹⁰ Practically speaking, their functioning requires close cooperation between moral tradition and democratic practice, for the former nurtures our subjective freedom while the latter consolidates our objective freedom.

Therefore, in the pursuit of human liberty, Mou found a way to unite Confucian ethics and democratic enterprise. First of all, the protection of human liberty demands various political-economic arrangements, from a mixed economy to plural party politics. But what is most important is the constitution. For Mou, it is the constitution that endows democratic politics with a character of detachment, that is, above any particular party, policy or interest group and devoted only to the advance of objective freedom. His example of the stage is illustrative:

The stage is public, which can neither be identical with any troupe nor any role; that is, no one team or one role can necessarily monopolize this stage. Democracy must maintain its character of detachment, and then it is qualified to be a formal condition for the realization of human rights. Democracy can be called a formal condition because it is a polity sustained by the constitution.⁹¹

More importantly, while liberal democracy protects a wide range of human rights, this does not guarantee that citizens are capable of making good use of these rights and liberties, not to mention properly fulfilling their responsibilities. In a critical observation of the American political system, he discerns that the strength and weakness of liberal democracy are the two sides of the same coin: "Liberal democracy is a kind of political institution, and political institutions cannot bear too much responsibility. The essence of liberal democracy is the restraining of political power as much as possible so that totalitarianism can be avoided. The so-called struggle for freedom is to protect your human rights and guarantee your liberties." He

⁸⁹ Mou Zongsan, *Philosophy of History* (Taipei: Linking Publishing, 2003).

⁹⁰ Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118-172.

⁹¹ Mou Zongsan, "For Freedom and Democracy: Support Youth Human Rights Movement on the Mainland," *TF* I, 280.

continues, “As for the social atmosphere, liberal democracy as a mere kind of political institution cannot be responsible for its improvement. A political institution is a matter, while culture is another.”⁹²

Based on the previous distinction between subjective and objective freedom, Mou further distinguishes the formal rights of liberty and its fulfilment in political practice. The former is the achievement of liberal democracy, but the latter surpasses political horizons and must be the task of moral enterprise. Only through moral cultivation can people learn how to take responsible actions for themselves and their neighbours in communal life. With the help of conceptual advances, Mou’s criticism of liberal democracy becomes compelling because, while such a regime provides an institutional environment to protect human liberty and rights, it is not responsible for nurturing moral agents in their subjective freedom. Nevertheless, without moral agents and their responsible actions, democracy might degrade into a form of mob politics in which hypocrisy, defamation, and embarrassment prevail. Therefore, between the two concepts of freedom exists a circular relationship, with responsible action as the axis. That is, responsible action is guided by a moral ideal of universal human liberty. As Mou concludes,

Human liberty and rights are the issues of democratic institutions. Under the institutional guarantee of liberty and rights, how can I use my freedom and realise my rights? This is another issue, an issue of “culture” or “cultivation.” In this era, if you really want to realise your freedom and decide your responsibility and then uphold it, then you must examine your own position in this era. This is to say; you should stand with the free world and defend freedom. Preserving freedom is not the responsibility of any individual, nor any nation. It is the responsibility of all humankind!⁹³

If this is the case, then the pressing question was indeed how Confucianism as a moral tradition would cultivate the actions of democratic responsibility. From his fifties onward, Mou Zongsan restricted himself from political engagement and devoted himself to the philosophical enterprise. This was not because he became politically reluctant or pessimistic, but rather because he sought an approach from the inner sainthood to the new outer kingdom. As we have shown, since the new objective of the outer kingdom must be transformed from monarchy to democracy, if Confucianism wants to modernise itself, it must find a way to articulate its moral vision under the formal conditions of democracy. In this light, the greatest challenge for

⁹² Mou Zongsan, “A Discussion on Solzhenitsyn’s Criticism of the United States,” *TF* II, 233.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 238.

Confucianism is not intellectual but practical. More precisely, it is the practice of uniting moral knowledge with moral action. In 1955, in his 19th lecture on humanities, Mou made clear this critical point for the enterprise of modernizing Confucianism:

We have spent much effort to explain the teachings of ancient China, and our purpose is to connect them to the modernization of China. Modernization is the question of extending the teachings of the inner sainthood. This aspect seems easy, but it is challenging to achieve or understand, because it is easy to understand the “principle” but difficult to understand “things.” It is easy to be a scholar or a member of the Imperial Academy, but challenging to be a statesman or a prime minister. At present, it is easy to be a philosopher or a scientist, but it is very challenging to be a statesman or political thinker who can contribute to state-building.⁹⁴

A careful reading of these lines reveals Mou’s insight: this practical difficulty can never be an excuse for intellectual withdrawal. Just the opposite. By stressing it, Mou intended to encourage himself and his students to overcome it and fulfil the mission in front of them. In the opening address of his 21st lecture on Humanities, he reiterated the primary objective of his research as well as its political implications:

Now we must know why we teach inner sainthood. In the past, [Confucians] taught about inner sainthood in order to reach the outer kingdom. Political performance (*shigong*, 事功) is the presentation of the outer kingdom. The so-called enterprise, career, politics, economy, rules, and institutions are all categories of the outer kingdom. The current enterprise of state building, as the extension of the teachings of the inner sainthood, is also the outer kingdom.⁹⁵

With this purpose in mind, Mou spent the second half of his academic career in the study of moral teachings of the Confucian tradition. His three-volume *Mind-Substance and Nature-Substance*, published in the late 1960s, is his *magnum opus* of this period. Focusing on the essential teachings of self-cultivation, he argues that the formation of a moral agent depends on her various practices in retrospective verification, that is, extending her innate knowledge to its

⁹⁴ Mou, *LH*, 109.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

utmost in concrete situations. Moreover, such a review of moral tradition is not merely for historical or philosophical interests; it is instead an effort to pave the way for the new kingdom. It is guided by Mou's responsibility for political ethics, as illustrated above. By specifying the critical dynamism of the extending practice, Mou surpasses his Confucian predecessors by identifying three virtues for the democratic endeavour. First is the virtue of *pragmatism*. This is the quality of handling an issue in a sensible way that suits the existing conditions rather than merely following given theories or principles. For Mou, it is a practical virtue of inquiry, an action of discovering the facts about something that really exists.⁹⁶ In his earlier study of traditional politics, he regrets the fact that pragmatism was so rare that institutional reforms were subordinate to power struggles among elites. For pragmatists and for the political tradition, this was a tragedy, one which modern China needed to avoid. Mou thus offers a solution, arguing that pragmatism can be found in the self-negation actions of the innate knowledge (*ziwo kanxian*, 自我坎陷).⁹⁷ Here the innate knowledge functions not in its formal cause, but in its material cause or the principles of things. Correspondingly, it requires the gravity of a moral action to shift from one's mind for rectification to the things under her investigation. For Mou, this is a temporary but necessary step for extending innate knowledge.

In other words, by exploring an epistemological field of practical knowledge, Mou injects pragmatic actions into the practice of extending knowledge. He explicates this insight with clarity via a metaphor about making tables:

For the fulfilment of the act of making a table, besides extending innate knowledge to the Principle, it also requires the practical knowledge of making tables as the necessary condition. Every action is conditioned by this kind of knowledge. Therefore, in the practice of extending innate knowledge, the term "extending" not only denotes a set of self-cultivation practices (in this case, all efforts must focus on the practice of extending), it also means that they must be supplemented by a set of practical knowledge. This set of knowledge is not guaranteed by innate knowledge or the Principle; it is to be learned from objects.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Mou Zongsan, *LX*, 202.

⁹⁷ For recent critical studies on Mou's usage of self-negation in political and ethical issues, see Stephen Angle, *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 194; David Elstein, "Mou Zongsan's New Confucian Democracy," *Contemporary Political Theory* 11, no. 2 (2012): 198-200.

⁹⁸ Mou, *LX*, 205-206.

For Mou, making an inquiry into practical knowledge is a distinct category of moral action, but it is not separate from the practice of extending innate knowledge. It rather means that the investigation of things must include the work of investigating the mechanisms or principles on their own. “The innate knowledge of my heart determines whether an action is right or not. In fulfilling this action, it is necessary to extend this innate knowledge, but in terms of ‘extending,’ the innate knowledge of my heart must decide to turn itself to another object.”⁹⁹ In the case of democracy, it requires that one must make every effort to grasp the democratic vision, to learn its practices and to offer solutions in specific situations. In other words, the virtue of pragmatism helps create intellectual and moral space for the pursuit of democratic knowledge. Mou was clearing the way for a new generation of pragmatists who would be responsible for democratic institutional building.

The second virtue is *conscientiousness*, referring to a moral responsibility to do one’s work carefully and to respect that of others. It is a combination of severity and equality. According to Mou, innate knowledge as the supreme creative principle must be one, but its actualisations can be diverse in persons and actions. In the traditional teachings of Confucianism, this is the moral distinction between universality and particularity (*liyi fenshu*, 理一分殊).¹⁰⁰ With a new emphasis on practical knowledge, Mou contends that the meaning and significance of the moral self lies in her particularity. Since a moral agent can extend her innate knowledge only with practical knowledge, and since such practical knowledge can be acquired only in the course of investigating things in specific situations, therefore, this moral agent is necessarily particular to others. In other words, while the Principle is universal, its realisation in the actions of the moral self is particular. In short, one source with many outlets. For Mou, these particular moral selves are the individuals who are responsible for their own actions with severity. Moreover, their recognition of their own ways in moral formation requires them to respect other ways in the same direction. A sense of equality thus emerges which respects the potential and distinct approach of extending innate knowledge. As Mou points out, even Wang Yangming or Zhu Xi had not incorporated this critical virtue into their moral teachings.¹⁰¹ For him, where this virtue prevails, a genuinely democratic community can be found, and that democratic community can create a suitable platform for its members to pursue their diverse forms of moral excellence.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 206-207.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 212. The intellectual development of the idea in Confucianism can be found in Liu Shu-hsien, “Liyi fenshu: Principle and Manifestations,” In *Encyclopaedia of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Antonio Cua (London; New York: Routledge, 2003): 409-410.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 213.

On the basis of pragmatism and conscientiousness, a third virtue can be further identified — *humility*, a virtue of true sainthood. As Mou explains, a saint is one who is willing to accept her ignorance in practical knowledge but never forsake herself in the pursuit of innate knowledge. He credits Wang Yangming for this insight:

That the saint is omniscient merely means that he knows the Principle of Nature and that he is omnipotent merely means that he is able to practice the Principle of Nature. The original substance of the mind of the saint is clear; therefore in all things he knows where the Principle of Nature lies and forthwith carries it out to the utmost. It is not that after the original substance of his mind becomes clear he then knows all the things in the world and is able to carry all of them out. Things in the world, such as the names, varieties, and systems, and plants and animals, are innumerable. Although the original substance of the saint is very clear, how can he know everything? What is not necessary to know, he does not have to seek to know. What he should know, he naturally asks others, like Confucius, who, when he entered the grand temple, asked about everything.¹⁰²

For Wang, a saint like Confucius does not have to know all the names and varieties of ceremonies and music. With confidence he announces, since Confucius knows the Principles of Nature, he can deduce all measures, regulations, and details from it.¹⁰³ For Mou, however, a saint cannot pretend to know the Principle of Nature before he investigates all the necessary measures, regulations and details. To seek humbly these various kinds of practical knowledge, being humble to the Principle of Nature as the source of genuine humanity, shows how the pattern of innate knowledge operates.¹⁰⁴ For this reason, a saint can never dare to monopolize the moral practice of innate knowledge and thus assume supreme authority to rule by virtue. Anyone who makes such claim has gone astray from the way to sainthood. The virtue of humility asks a true saint to exemplify her moral excellence by fulfilling others and be fulfilled by others in a community of shared governance.

To be sure, Mou never explicitly used these concepts in his work, but he did provide a thorough explanation of how Confucian ethics can promote responsible actions towards the

¹⁰² Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 201. The story of Confucius was recorded in *Analects* 3:15.

¹⁰³ Mou, *MS* III, 202.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 215-216.

democratic enterprise. In this regard, all three virtues—pragmatism, conscientiousness and humility—can be deduced from the moral practice of innate knowledge and be applied in democratic politics. They are signs of the fact that an individual is being cultivated by Confucian ethics and is undergoing moral formation through responsible actions towards others in communal life. In other words, a genuine democratic mind (and deeds) can and must be shaped by the Confucian tradition. Noticing the existence and work of these virtues, we see the strength of Mou Zongsan and the weakness of his critics. For Lin Yu-sheng and other liberal thinkers, Confucianism is a belief system which can provide only a universal worldview or abstract value judgements,¹⁰⁵ while democracy must be seen as a set of political institutions, with ideals behind them. In this narrow understanding, Mou's work at best offers a moral justification for democracy. They dismiss another more important element of his Confucian ethics, that is, practical and responsible actions in the democratic endeavour. As we have illustrated, Mou's intellectual and political engagement in Social Democracy spanned his career. The meaning and virtues of responsible actions not only appeared in his words but were also exemplified in his deeds. Recognising this fact helps to respond to the criticism of Yu Ying-shih, who points out Mou's potential blindness toward hypocritical politics in Taiwan. It can be argued that, although Mou in his later years focused on philosophical and historical issues, and although his popular writings on political issues were largely driven by Communist criticisms, his original political position (from the 1930s) never changed. First, his uncompromising attitude toward one-party dictatorship, whether on the Communist mainland or in authoritarian Taiwan, remained the same. Second, from advocacy for socialism to identification of democratic virtues, the vision of Social Democracy was a constant concern for Mou Zongsan. Moreover, as he continued the ideological struggle, his Confucian vision of democratic community became more lucid, and his concern about the future of humanity became even stronger. Like Barth, he was unashamed to be a prophetic voice for his beloved tradition and for a noble political enterprise.

¹⁰⁵ Another major critic of Neo-Confucianism is Chang Hao. See Chang Hao, *The Consciousness of Darkness and Democratic Tradition* (Beijing: New Star Press, 2006). For more empathetic discussions on Mou's philosophical efforts, see Stephen Angle, *Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy: Toward Progressive Confucianism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012) and David Elstein, *Democracy in Contemporary Confucian Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

5.4 Comparative observations

Many moderns believe that human will and power can move mountains. Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan, however, did not move traditions. Both thinkers believed that it is only within tradition that good wills are formulated and constructive powers are generated. For this reason, when they were involved in political endeavours, both refused to separate political responsibility from their religious or moral traditions. By so doing, they eventually developed fresh visions of the common life with strong ethical emphases.

Comparing their thought and contributions is the task of our conclusion. Let us start from the fact that both were deeply involved in social democratic movements. Barth and Mou had personal or organisational connections with the SPD, one of the major social democratic parties of the twentieth century. Barth joined the party twice and knew its intellectual leaders well. Based on this involvement in party politics, he undertook reflexive thinking concerning the strengths and weaknesses of religious socialism, which informed and shaped his theological ethics at the deepest level. As for Mou, his political mentors were the first generation to bring ideals and practices of Social Democracy from Germany to China. Involvement in party activities led Mou to formulate his social democratic version of state building and further root it in Confucian ethics. On one hand, these similar trajectories of their political engagements help us explain the common points within their political visions. For instance, they agree on the vital institutional arrangements of democratic socialism such as rule of law, political participation, and social justice. They also agree on the moral and political objectives of such institutional arrangements when they distinguish democratic socialism from National Socialism, revolutionary communism and liberal democracy. We may add that, it was precisely their engagement in labour movements and standing for the welfare of the majority in political struggles that contributed to their proper reading of the tradition. Therefore, whether in Switzerland, Germany or China, it is easy to see the normative similarities between the two thinkers.

On the other hand, their different ways of receiving Social Democracy came from their unique ethical concerns and intellectual themes, and from the contrasting political-cultural elements of their societies. One noticeable difference is the role of the state. Mou perceives state-building as the primary task of his political advocacy and thus packages Social Democracy as a promising political agenda to be implemented. In Barth's version, however, this state-centred concern totally disappears. Instead, he made a substantial effort to connect Social Democracy with Protestantism as two established traditions in concrete practice. In his mind,

what was at risk was not the integrity of the state institutions but that of the Christian community and its political witness. Another remarkable difference is the weight of historical lessons. In the context of the newly established republican regime in China, Mou was still working in the early stages of institutional learning and contestation. Thus, he had to identify the positive and negative political legacies of traditional China so that the necessity of a new and foreign design, democratic socialism, could be articulated. Barth's political concern, by contrast, was largely restricted to contemporary issues. Given the fact that the democratic socialist movement had shaped the European political landscape over several decades and had become an influential political force in Germany, Barth found it more sensible to assess state policies by resorting to specific doctrinal teachings rather than a thorough review of the whole tradition. Here we can find that responsibilities in local politics shaped Mou's and Barth's contextual readings of democratic socialism and the associated intellectual and political agenda. To a large degree, their religious or moral traditions helped them master the interactions between their political visions and contexts.

This leads us to a deeper level of comparative observations. The overlaps and differences of their political conceptions of responsible action can be seen in both form and content. As they insist, both the formal and material aspects of political responsibility must be informed by the source of genuine humanity. For Barth, to be responsive to the world of politics in witness, the church as the Christian community must be first renewed by the Word of God in prayer. As he states, "When political conditions change, Christians will simply take it as an occasion to read the Scriptures anew and to rediscover how dangerously and how beneficially, how consistently and how gently, how profoundly and how practically the Word of God speaks to those who know it is their only refuge."¹⁰⁶ In other words, the church must submit itself to the prophetic Word: the joyful message of Jesus Christ, its promise and its admonition. Then it will acquire new strength in its political witness and develop a fundamental relationship to the civil community. In its moral deliberations, judgements and actions, the church can exercise its priesthood by reminding the state of its duty as the divine instrument to safeguard humanity in communal life. Moreover, in its prayers, preaching and proclamations, the church as the inner circle of the divine witness can exemplify the work of Jesus Christ in its concrete and particular actions toward the state as the outer circle. As Barth stresses, every time the church returns to the source faithfully and obediently, it will venture to its political vocation freely and

¹⁰⁶ Karl Barth, "The Christian Community in the Midst of Political Change," *AS*, 89.

confidently. This is the foundation of Christian responsibility when participating in political enterprises; the rest is built on this foundation.

For Mou Zongsan, the political endeavour is inherently a category of moral action, that is, the practice of extending the innate knowledge of good, and its primary concern is to fulfil benevolence and righteousness in various relationships of communal life. Thus, he understands political responsibility as the actualisation of innate knowledge in state affairs. To protect each person's potential for sainthood and to respect their distinct formulations, the moral practice of extending innate knowledge must be supplemented by the institutional arrangements of Social Democracy. But Social Democracy is merely the formal condition for human liberty – it must be sustained by responsible action towards oneself and one's neighbours. Sainthood, as the ultimate vision of Confucian ethics, is embodied in the political responsibility of a democratic community. Everyone who seeks to pursue sainthood must embrace humanity in individuals and communities.

From a comparative perspective, it can be said that for Barth and Mou, the form of political responsibility must be seen as the guardianship of humanity in its concrete and common forms. This formal feature is clearly evident in their normative statements. In his twelve concrete examples, Barth ventures analogical practice to connect the Christian community and the civil community. In his elaboration of five concrete relations and especially the new way toward outer kingdom, Mou shows that a communal life is indispensable to one's cultivation of morality. Therefore, despite divergent vocabularies and emphases, both Barth and Mou draw out the crucial importance of the common life and inject a spirit into its concrete forms as formulating and protecting the humanity of individuals and communities. It is this spirit of the common life that explains their theological/Confucian concern for human freedom and responsibility, their insistence on equal, just, peaceful and loving democratic governance, and their suspicion of political systems seeking radical individualism or collectivism. Concerning the content of political responsibility, the two conceptions do vary, following their distinct traditions, though both point to the moral practice of democratic socialism. It is because of the common task shared by the two thinkers: incorporating the enterprise of democratic socialism into the more universal vision of the common life defined by their distinct traditions. For Barth, the social democratic endeavour as a form of human responsible action can be properly confirmed by Christian political witness in its individual and collective forms. In an analogical manner, such responsible actions find their source from the kingdom ethics of God in which the imperative of Jesus Christ as the divine Word of God calls Christians to be His responsible witnesses in various and virtuous actions. For Mou, the experiment of democratic socialism can

be incorporated into a political project of reconstruction. The new civil community should allow every member to have the freedom to cultivate genuine humanity in her responsible actions, which is simply the moral practice of extending her innate knowledge. In sum, the two formulations bring morality and community together by translating communal political engagement into moral exercise and projecting moral visions onto the political enterprise.

Given the insightfulness and thoroughness of these distinct conceptions, generated by these two thinkers against the hegemonies of Nazism and communism, one question remains: to what extent can these two political visions provide a promising agenda to transform neoliberalism (the updated version of capitalist society) into a more humane, loving and just community? Here it is useful to sketch the multi-faceted landscape of modern capitalism with help from two prominent social theorists, Max Weber and Paul Tillich. Weber was probably the first modern social scientist to pay significant attention to understanding and explaining the rise of the bureaucratic class in modern capitalism. The organisation of the modern legal-rational state, he explained, derives from a general progressive paradigm of the division of labour in modern capitalism. For him, the separation of administrative staff and administrative officials could take place in any form of organisation with a hierarchy of authority. Therefore, like those industrial workers who suffered from capitalist exploitation, expert officialdom was also completely detached from the possession of its means of administration. This led Weber to suggest that *bureaucratic specialization of tasks* is the most intriguing feature of capitalism. Unlike Marx, Weber never regarded the class relationship between labour and capital as the essential character of capitalism; he saw it rather in the rational orientation of productive activity. In this respect, the process of the separation of the worker from the means of production was only one specific case of a general process of the rationalization of conduct that prevails in all spheres of modern capitalist society. Weber's application of the ideal-type concept of bureaucratization thus denotes this irreversible historical process. Moreover, in this unique conceptualization, the possibility of transcending capitalism was eliminated once and for all. For many socialists, including the CCP revolutionaries, a new and better social order implies a deliberate imposition of rational control of economic activity through the centralization of the economy and state control of economic enterprises. However, as many tragedies in former socialist countries have shown, the only consequence of such attempts is an unexpected expansion of the bureaucratic system associated with the dictatorship of the official rather than the proletariat.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). Refer to Giddens's detailed comments on this issue. Anthony

Paul Tillich likewise underscored the significance of the structural understanding of modern capitalism. Adopting the concept *the bourgeois principle*, Tillich emphasised an ultimate, fundamental attitude toward the world which is wider than the concrete expressions of bourgeois society during any historical period. In *The Religious Situation*, Tillich summarised the key components of capitalist modernity: natural science, technology and the capitalist economy. Natural science services technology, and technology makes possible the emergence of capitalism as a global economic system. Among these elements, only the *unconditioned dominance* of the capitalist economy characterizes the bourgeois spirit, for it tends to put everything else into its service. The political power of nation-states, for example, is often used by the entrepreneurial class to repress proletarian revolts in domestic affairs and to facilitate imperialist ambitions in foreign relations. The social life of bourgeois society is composed of mutually separate individuals driven by economic purposes and demands. Even ethical ideals are no exception. What prevails in such a society is economic efficiency justified morally by leaders, passive acceptance by the masses and impersonal charity for the economic helpless.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, Tillich regarded this holistic form of the bourgeois spirit as a demonic power in modern society. It not only subjects all other spheres of human life to itself, depriving things of their intrinsic character and integration, but also causes class struggles and other destructive divisions among social groups. Where Weber appropriated the term “iron cage” to describe a gloomy picture of humanity dominated by the capitalist spirit, Tillich ascribed it to the powerful secular religion that governs people’s souls.

For a thinker of democratic socialism like Barth or Mou, the pressing realities mentioned above indicate that order of governance can be accepted or fought but not avoided. How, then, to raise meaningful criticism and effective responses? There are at least three possible options. One possible strategy is to jump on the bandwagon, become a part of governance and be included alongside those who positively embrace it; in other words, an enthusiast genuinely seeking to reform. We call this strategy *realism*. This is the way of the elites of the social democratic movement: accepting the existing capitalist situation and seeking the best outcome within it. However, it also involves an uneasy compromise with the mainstream position. Said more critically, realists tend to sanction the existing order in order to change it or obtain profit within it. In this case, they have to defend that order against prophetic criticism, usually at the cost of their integrity and independence, the very preconditions for truth proclamation. Those

Giddens, *Politics, Sociology and Social Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 37–38.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Tillich, *The Religious Situation* (New York: Meridian Books, 1962), 43–44.

who favour this strategy of the critic-from-within-the-establishment are like ancient house prophets or the priests in front of Zarathustra. This option held no attraction for Barth and Mou.

The opposite option is to avoid governance altogether in the hope that it will go away. This is a typical strategy of *segregation*. Following this strategy blindly, is an ostrich-like attitude and is nothing but opportunism by another name—it will eventually create a silent majority who do not engage in opposition. But there are still some with clear minds who seek a pure moral reserve by withdrawing from the polluted mainstream. Admittedly, rejecting the dominant capitalist order of the moral world requires extraordinary courage, strength and character. Those who choose the unpopular way of retreat must also want to keep these virtues, and they can also set unique examples of implicit resistance. The weakness of this option, for Mou and Barth, is that segregation forfeits the opportunity to shape the political sphere and correct the distortions with a sense of responsibility. That is the cost of self-righteousness.

These two classical strategies have in common that they dodge the duty of beginning now, the creation of a new way in which the rejection of the old is accredited by the alternative reality of the new. Both Barth and Mou sought this third way—the *radical reformist approach*. It is based on a conviction that responsible and responsive action can never arise out of the present world we share with our neighbours or enemies. Thus, the primary audience of such a critical message must be insiders of governance rather than outsiders. To achieve this goal, both thinkers first consume a healthy diet of moral debate related to governance in a specific tradition and then, if possible, create a unique intellectual and moral position for themselves. This strategy involves creating a distinct community with a different set of values and a coherent way of incarnating them.¹⁰⁹ Only in this way can the power of such a critical stance be presented without compromise or indifference. Informed by their distinct traditions, Barth and Mou not only learned the purpose and means of democratic politics, they also enriched the ethical aspect of the tradition which inspires its practitioners to build a genuinely democratic community. Far from providing a belief system to justify a particular political system and its ideology, these two thinkers offered critical and constructive assessments of democratic socialism and its counterparts in the modern political landscape through ethical perspectives; meanwhile they injected a new spirit into democratic politics as a noble enterprise of protecting and nurturing the flourishing of humanity in communal life. For these reasons, we must not dismiss their overarching contributions to the political reflections and cultivation of democratic practitioners.

¹⁰⁹ Mou Zongsan thought about the possibility of building Confucian Church, although in its early stage. See Mou Zongsan, “The Spirit and Prospect of the Lectures,” *LH*, 3-5.

Given the strength of their moral visions, it is more important to address certain weaknesses shared by the two thinkers. For any serious democratic socialist, this task is not only necessary but also productive. One common weakness is their underdeveloped account of capitalist society in terms of its institutional and cultural establishment. We need not criticise Mou and Barth for ignoring the bureaucratic orientation of the modern capitalist state as well as the predominance of capitalist secular religion, but lacking an in-depth institutional analysis of modern capitalism may have serious consequences. It is therefore not surprising to see that both fail either to draw the complicated relationships between moral practices and various institutions or to demonstrate the negative impact of the capitalist establishment on moral agents and their actions. Besides that, we may also find that their lists of democratic virtues are far from comprehensive and need to be extended, given the pressing social and cultural realities of pluralism. Theoretically, what is missing in their moral visions can be supplemented through constructive dialogue with other critical theorists. Practically, what we need to do next is to follow their footprints and identify responsible actions in a changing political context. All these issues will be addressed in the final chapter.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

As an academic enterprise, the inquiry of comparative ethics normally sets up two principal objectives. It aims to identify ethical ideas and practices relative to a particular human community; meanwhile, it attempts to articulate truths universal to all human beings. For these reasons, an ethicist has to deal with historical, comparative and normative tasks within and beyond a tradition. Yearley reflects on the promise and challenge of such an endeavour: “I think there are some remarkable similarities, at least among the religions or cultures I know something about, and I find that uplifting. But speaking about those truths seems to require a language that goes beyond what a particular tradition offers....We need a new way of talking about them without completely losing touch with the traditions of which we are a part. It seems to me finding that new language is absolutely critical.”¹

This study, accordingly, is an attempt to discover such a new way of talking about the theme of responsibility across different traditions. The two thinkers under comparison, the Christian theologian Karl Barth and the Confucian philosopher Mou Zongsan, allow us to pursue something “uplifting” when we focus on their distinct accounts (from two far-apart traditions) of the sources and actions of responsibility. Despite their significant divergence, both Barth and Mou place the idea of responsibility at the centre of their moral visions of the common life. It is this legacy of the two thinkers that is worthy of careful comparison and creative construction. Building on the analysis of the previous chapters, it is time to crystallize our major inspirations and contributions. This task will be handled in three interrelated parts: methodological reflection on the study of comparative ethics; normative discernment of democratic values and their connections to religious or moral traditions; and, finally, ethical responses to the political and ideological powers in a neoliberal age. As we shall see, Barth’s and Mou’s moral visions still shed light on our talk and action as responsible beings.

6.1 Practical theories of responsibility

In this study of comparative ethics, the prism through which we are looking is the practical theories of responsibility. For Yearley, practical theories aim to explain and guide human

¹ Daniel Goleman, *Healing Emotions: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on Mindfulness, Emotions, and Health* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), 27.

practices and thus lead them towards a complete flourishing. This kind of theorizing resembles the approach to praxis utilized by Aristotle in his ethics.² This is a unique realm of the ethical world which contains a list of virtues arranged in a hierarchical order. In its prominent features, it differs from two other realms. The first is the realm of primary theories, containing universal commands and prohibitions. Philosophical or religious ethicists who work in this realm usually pay attention to injunctions in their general and abstract forms. The second is the realm of secondary theories, consisting of concrete ways or forms of life.³ This is the working field of historians and anthropologists. Practical theories, as Yearley suggests, can helpfully connect with both injunctions and ways of life and creatively illuminate the contextual and concrete relationships between the two realms. It can also establish manageable comparisons of the ethical accounts without partial emphasis either on a few general and abstract injunctions or on the complicated and diverse forms of life. The effective operation of practical theories requires a comparative interpreter to refer constantly to the other realms. Practical theories work with injunctions through their conceptual forms and appeals to universality; they work with ways of life through their embeddedness in concrete contexts.⁴ The above methodological guidance explained the process and structure of our comparative analysis. Specifically, Chapter 3 dealt with the connection between practical theories of responsibility and their sources in the realm of injunctions, Chapter 4 examined the various dynamisms of practical responsibility, and Chapter 5 focused on the relationships between practical responsibility and the realm of political life. In this way, we followed Yearley's methodological innovation and extended his classical study of the virtue of courage to the conception of responsibility. This is our first contribution to the enterprise of comparative ethics.

The specific interpretive tools used in our study are two bridge concepts, the source of responsibility and the action of responsibility. The concepts are focal terms: they possess enough meaningful content to guide comparative inquiry but nonetheless are open-ended enough to allow further elaboration and development. As Stalnaker explains, "bridge concepts may be projected into each thinker or text to be compared as a way to thematise their disparate elements and order their details around these anchoring terms."⁵ It is worth noting that bridge concepts are unlike "thin concepts" or transcendent universals in their specificity in regard to

² For Aristotle's general approach to ethics, see his *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. T. Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985).

³ Lee Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (New York: SUNY Press, 1990), 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

⁵ Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006), 17.

either the object of study or to the particular goals of comparative study that they are geared to facilitate. They can therefore overcome two popular interpretive dangers in comparative studies, namely, overgeneralization and anachronism. For Stalnaker, these hermeneutical instruments enable a comparative ethicist “to transcend past difficulties in comparative studies by carefully focusing attention on the work of two influential thinkers on topics of significant contemporary ethical interest, topics about which both developed sustained reflections. In this way, they can be addressed as theoretical interlocutors and not merely as objects of study awaiting the organizing ministrations of the contemporary interpreter.”⁶

Given the hermeneutical strengths of bridge concepts, the critical issue is then the selection of promising concepts. In this regard, Jung Lee has provided a useful distinction between two compelling approaches: the externalist and the internalist. An externalist interpreter is guided by native concepts and framing categories of the subjects under examination. This implies an appreciation of the conceptual features of the objects of comparison, and it cautions the interpreter against applying hermeneutical concepts or categories to a tradition or text if she cannot find enough compatibility between the conceptual cluster in question. For an internalist, however, the burden of responsibility falls on the imaginative capacities of the interpreter to discover some underlining truths in the objects of comparison. This privileges the construction of the categories of comparison as a celebrated activity. At this point, Yearley’s argument is quite illuminating,

The very idea of understanding each thinker “in his own terms” is transmuted, and even productively challenged, by the process of comparison...We must use our imagination, then, to examine and construct analogies, to set and reset focal and secondary meanings, and to articulate their relationships. Some may hope that the mind’s imaginative capacities manifest a power that unveils deeper, universal truths about the world, truths accessible only if those capacities are activated by that power.⁷

While in some ways the focal terms useful to the objects of comparison reside in the mind of interpreters, there is still a great temptation, that is, the problem of arbitrariness where the selection of the objects may be excessively informed by the interpreter’s own terms rather than

⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁷ Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, 199-200.

that of the thinker.⁸ Therefore, what is expected for a comparative interpreter is a sensible balance between the internalist and externalist approaches, so that the full power of her analytical reason and constructive imagination can be released.

As Chapter 3 showed, the ethics of responsibility of Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan represent two distinctive formulations, with the source of responsibility as either the divine command of God (Barth) or the innate knowledge of good (Mou). These subjects of responsibility differ in terms of their activities. But when we examine their specific content, it is remarkable to see that they are similar in that they are transcendent, personal and practical. Moreover, both stress that these sources of responsibility must be counted as fundamental human realities rather than Kantian postulates. For these two thinkers, pursuing a pure and transcendent concept of moral imperative, as well as insisting on an optimistic view of human reason, as Kant did, insufficiently addresses the desirability and practicability of moral principles in real-life situations. Meanwhile, this would separate moral knowledge and moral practice, and since it would emphasise the former, it would also sacrifice concreteness of imperative for its general feature and thus undermine the power of the moral imperative in real human affairs. Recognizing these weaknesses, both Barth and Mou seek other foundations for their ethics of responsibility. Barth stresses the specificity of the divine command to human situations. For him, rules or generalizations can never encompass all that God's judgement may be saying, and cannot predict in advance what that judgement will be. Likewise, Mou stresses the specificity of the innate knowledge of good to a very concrete struggle against corruption and of deprivation of humanity. The result of their common departure from Kantian ethics is the creation of two new forms of act-deontology that call general rules into question; instead, duty must be fulfilled as a specific deed in a specific situation. In sum, the new formulations allow Barth and Mou to stress the practical dimension of responsibility without sacrificing its normative sources. Moral knowledge and moral action can be reunited in accordance with their traditions. These observations and explanations are illuminating when we discuss the connections between practical theories of responsibility and secondary theories. Such connections, in the case of responsibility, are highly flexible in theological and Confucian ethics and could profoundly reshape modern moral horizons. This is the second substantial contribution our study makes to the field.

Building on these findings, Chapter 4 further demonstrated two rich accounts of the responsible action by Barth and Mou, who both argue that through the casting process of various

⁸ Jung Lee, "The Rhetoric of Context: Comparative Religious Ethics and the Limits of Virtue," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41, no. 4 (2013): 571-572.

responsible actions, human wills and actions can become the ideal vectors of the ultimate being in action. Unlike their criticisms of Kantian ethics, here the two thinkers develop their practical theories in zealous conversations with their forerunners. Informed and inspired by the Reformers, especially John Calvin, Barth highlights human vocation as a dynamic process in which Jesus Christ illuminates us with the knowledge of God and of ourselves and transforms us to become Christians. In a similar pattern, Mou follows Wang Yangming by describing our retrospective verification toward the innate knowledge of good in its two-dimensional activities (sudden and gradual awakening). The subtle difference is that Barth seems to be more straightforward in designating the formal aspect of human responsible action, while Mou is more explicit in distinguishing its incremental and radical types. What is most remarkable in our comparison is that both see the formation of the responsible self as a radical transformation which relies on two directional principles, namely supreme objectivity and supreme subjectivity. For Barth, the kingdom ethics of God define the principles of our diverse actions in vocation. The imperative implies that our concern for the divine command of God and the demands of the others must always precede our concern for ourselves. Therefore, our priorities must follow an order from Heaven to Earth, from the communal to the individual, and finally, from others to the self. For Mou, our responsible actions must follow the ethics of extending knowledge, which requires rectifying our mind and making our will sincere through loving and serving others. Therefore, the priority of our concerns in retrospective verification must also follow an order, but one converse to that of Barth; that is, from the self to the others, from the individual to the communal, and ultimately, from Earth to Heaven. It is also interesting to see that, in both cases, others have an intrinsic role in our responsible actions and cannot be ignored or alienated in our moral formation. Moreover, only in the course of serving and loving others are we acting as a responsible self to love and serve our God (Barth) or to extend our innate knowledge to its utmost (Mou). In sum, with their assumptions, forms and content, these two unique syntheses of teleological elements are articulated under act-deontological frames. Such configurations not only are faithful to religious doctrines or moral traditions, but also offer mandates which secure a formal and constant character in the dynamic and contextualized process of moral formation. As the third theoretical contribution, these findings expand the conventional territories of act-deontological ethics and deepen contemporary readings of Barth's theological ethics.⁹

⁹ For instance, Hauerwas raised criticism of Barth's divine command ethics, arguing Barth paid insufficient attention on the formation of Christian characters and virtues. Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1985), 172-174, 176. Earlier works include William Frankena, *Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973), 28; Robert Wills, *The Ethics of Karl Barth* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 171. A helpful clarification of Barth's stance on this issue is made by Shun Kai Cheng, *Tang*

6.2 Responsibility and the democratic enterprise

We now shift our reflections from the context of comparative ethics to the political one, that is, the relevance of religious or moral traditions to modern democratic endeavours. Let us first consider the case of democracy and Christianity. Contemporary debates about whether Christian faith and democratic aspirations can coexist are deeply shaped by two distinct schools of thought: *constructive* and *critical*. Scholars of the first school hold that the democratic tradition is much richer than the secular orientation of modernity. Thus, after we diagnose the secular distortions of modernity, it is possible to see a genuine Christian community, intellectually and morally, connected to a democratic polity. This follows from the belief that democracy cannot survive without the religious basis which gives meaning to life; therefore, in order for democracy to be retrieved it has to be revitalized by being reconnected to the driving force of a Christian vision of a just world order. Writing in exile during World War II, Jacques Maritain recognised that the struggle against Nazi totalitarianism and the struggle for democracy were intrinsically related to the Christian Gospel. In his view, it was the Gospel that had awakened the secular, temporal consciousness to supreme moral principles. Thus, the real content of democracy must be understood as the earthly pursuit of Gospel truths concerning the transcendent origins and destiny of man and society.¹⁰ Careful not to equate democracy with the sovereign rule of the people, he reminded his readers that Christianity must reject the populist assumption in its understanding of democratic power. “The people are not God, the people do not have infallible reason and virtues without flaw, the will of the people or the spirit of the people is not the rule which decides what is just or unjust.”¹¹ During the same period of turbulence, Reinhold Niebuhr contended that democracy needs a firmer theological foundation than that provided by liberal culture. He thus outlined his famous Christian realism with an emphasis on the Christian doctrine of original sin, which is “more adequate for the development of a democratic society than either the optimism with which democracy has become historically associated or the moral cynicism which inclines human communities to tyrannical political

Yunyi and Karl Barth: A Comparative Study of Ethics (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2002), 186-191.

¹⁰ According to Maritain, Christianity teaches the inalienable dignity of every human being fashioned in the image of God, the inviolability of conscience, the unity of the human race, the natural equality of all men, children of the same God and redeemed by the same Christ, the dignity of labour and the dignity of the poor, the primacy of inner values and good will over external values, universal brotherhood, love, and justice. Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy: The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012).

¹¹ Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 93.

strategies.”¹² In so far as democracy is built on the Enlightenment-derived optimism about human nature, it is always in danger of anarchy or tyranny.

With the same caution in mind, contemporary political theologian John de Gruchy asks: what kind of democracy, and what kind of new world order, should be in the making? To answer, he distinguishes the democratic system from its moral vision. The *system* is those constitutional principles and procedures, symbols and convictions which have become an essential part of any genuine democracy in its historical form. The *vision* is that hope for a just society in which all people are equal with mutually respected differences, and in which all people are free while maintaining mutual responsibility.¹³ He then presents a comprehensive historical review in order to show the Christian contribution to the development of democracy. First, he says, Christianity provided the matrix within which the democratic system evolved in the Western world: proto-democratic forms of churches and social life, providing antecedents for the intellectual development of democratic concepts. Second, Christian churches have long been involved in the pursuit of democratic transformation, especially during the latter half of the twentieth century. Last and most important, it is the Christian witness to the prophetic vision of the reign of God in Jesus Christ that has been the most durable contribution. This vision enables Christians to hold their hope and justice together, to care about the common good, and to remain in tension with political systems.¹⁴ Based on these observations, Gruchy develops a solid normative statement of the convergence between democratic aspirations and the Christian ecumenical vision.¹⁵ Such theological guidance, he urges, is essential for the church if it is to participate in critical solidarity in the process of global democratization.

While the constructive school strives to outline the essential relationship between Christianity and democracy, the critical school sees democracy as the chosen polity of secular modernity and thus something that must be rejected. Bonhoeffer, for instance, dedicated himself to a modern theological understanding of human freedom, sociality, and justice, and even sacrificed his own life in a heroic assassination attempt on Hitler. However, he was also sceptical about whether democracy could solve the political problems of the post-war era, and he was deeply fearful of what he called “bolshevism.” John Milbank explicitly rejects the

¹² Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and A Critique of Its Traditional Defense* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), xv-xii.

¹³ John de Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy: A Theology for A Just World Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

¹⁴ Bellah observed that “unlike many other groups, religious communities are often concerned not only with the common good of the nation but also with the common good of all human beings” because they regard their ultimate responsibility to a transcendent God. To forget that, “is to obscure perhaps to most important thing we need to understand about the role of religion in society.” Robert Bellah, *The Good Society* (Vintage, 1992), 181.

¹⁵ Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy*, 276.

secular account of modern democracy. For him, to restore a proper sense of God's authority over the political community, political theology must renounce any form of political community with its essence as a denial of God's authority. Moreover, it must not allow any form of secular thought to dictate its understanding of the political sphere. According to his diagnosis, the modern secularist error involves both "the progressive stripping away of the sacred from some profane remainder" and "the substitution of one mythos of salvation for another." This error proceeds from the anthropological assumption of individual dominion, on which the liberal state is based. Moreover, under the auspices of the state, such a secularized discourse eventually causes a violent disruption of the previous scheme of participation in the divine and usurps the transformative function of the church. An exemplary case is the American version of liberal democracy. Hauerwas raises a devastating criticism: that the political aspects of the "American dream" are a moral trap for Christian communities. To sustain the division of labour between procedural justice and the moral formation of people capable of doing justice, Hauerwas argues, liberalism has helped formulate a capitalist market society in which "greed and selfishness become political virtues." The state, as the single distributive power in the theory of liberalism, tends to serve corporate interests more than the formation of citizens qualified for work of the common good. Ironically, since the late nineteenth century, American Christian thinkers have claimed that Christians have the responsibility to sustain their own liberal-democratic civilization. In this way, mainstream theology, shaped by the American way of life and the superiority of individual autonomy, has gradually lost its genuine identity as those called to follow the Messiah.¹⁶ Underlying the disagreement between the constructive and critical schools is the defining political character of Christianity, at least when viewed theologically.

With a similar concern but different contexts, the modern study of Confucian political ideas has been centred on their relationship to modernity. Max Weber, and many since him, have had a predominantly negative view – that the Confucian ethic lacks a modern character. In his comparative study *Religions in China*, Weber asks why China and other Eastern civilizations had not developed a modern capitalist society, as the countries of Western Europe had. He notices that while Chinese Confucian scholar-officials did build a comprehensive bureaucratic system under a monarchy, they still undertook a traditional mode of governance.

¹⁶ In a quite incisive tone, Hauerwas addressed the paradox for the church in America. "The more Christians try to make Christianity a philosophy sufficient to sustain a society, especially a liberal society, the more we must distort or explain away our fundamental beliefs. Therefore in the name of sustaining a civilization Christians increasingly undercut the ability of the church to take a critical stance towards this society." Stanley Hauerwas, "A Christian Critique of Christian America," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 461.

More importantly, Confucian teachers developed a this-worldly secularism for their disciples, which lacked the transcendental dimension of the European Puritans. It was this particular ethical orientation, Weber said, that prevented the Confucian spirit from being transformed into a modern rationalist one.¹⁷ In other words, the Confucian ethic was a major obstacle to modern political rationality. As Weberian Sinologist Joseph Levenson remarks, for moderns, Confucianism is an antique confined to the museum. Adopting Weber's distinction between traditional and bureaucratic modes of authority, he argues that the Chinese state, with its monarchy and Confucian bureaucracy, fundamentally belongs to the former category. Traditional Confucian officials, standing with the emperors' moves to make the world (*tian xia*, 天下) private, failed to manifest a moral concern for public wellbeing.¹⁸ Another Weberian sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt, however, accepts the potential transformative force in the Confucian ethic. He thus refines Weber's summary of Confucianism, using the term "this-worldly transcendentalism." With this neologism, he stresses the tension between the Confucian normative claim of divine ordinance and its realistic view of the political world.¹⁹ Along these lines, Theodore de Bary further argues for a transcendental horizon in the Confucian worldview, similar to that of the Hebrew prophets. However, he concedes, the Confucian prophets lacked their Hebrew counterparts' sense of a covenantal relationship between God and his people, which eventually seduced them to underestimate the political participation of ordinary people (a key element of the modern democratic vision); thus they were limited to acknowledging that the only transformative force of the world rested in sagely kings and their noble ministers.²⁰

Inspired by the Weberian question, contemporary scholars have further asked what Confucianism lacks that prevents it from creating a robust vision of democratic governance. Lin Yusheng and Chang Hao, for instance, both point to the inherent weakness of the transcendental dimension in Confucian this-worldly transcendentalism.²¹ Chang develops the concept of "dark consciousness" to answer the question. It is this clear consciousness of the unresolvable demonic elements within the world and human nature, he explains, that makes

¹⁷ Max Weber, *The Religions of China* (New York: Free Press, 1964).

¹⁸ Levenson further illustrated how, with the pressure of modern western industrialism on Chinese society and its culture, the Chinese state began to change, while quite slowly and adaptively, its identity from the former to the latter one. Along with this trend is the demise of an aesthetic value and self-sufficiency of the Confucian ideal of noble man. Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 41-43.

¹⁹ Shmuel Eisenstadt, ed., *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* Vol. 1. (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

²⁰ Williams De Bary, *The Trouble with Confucianism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

²¹ Lin Yusheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979); Chang Hao, *Dark Consciousness and Democratic Tradition* (Beijing: Xinxing Chubanshe, 2006).

people pessimistic about achieving ultimate goodness. The Christian idea of human sin is an exemplary case in this sense. However, the dominant view of Confucianism is rather opposite. From Mencius to modern Confucian intellectuals, human nature has always been celebrated as open, even inclined, to ideal sainthood, the intellectual root of saintly kingship and rule by virtue. Thus, Confucianism usually prefers a few virtuous rulers to the institutional arrangements of constitutional democracy. Agreeing with Chang, Thomas Metzger deepens the analysis by differentiating Confucian optimism in terms of human nature and its epistemic capacity. In particular, he emphasises the Confucian tradition's lack of a so-called "epistemological revolution", as in the modern intellectual history of the west. A series of modern thinkers – Rene Descartes, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Max Weber, for example – all agreed that the ontological knowledge of the true world is not attainable for mere human minds, and thus they were suspicious of any attempt at building political and moral rules on such a bold epistemological claim. Modern Confucian intellectuals, on the contrary, are quite optimistic on this point. Many of them put great effort into creating a comprehensive system of the ideal world ruled by absolute moral or rational principles.²² When this totalitarian mentality was linked to Rousseau's idea of revolution, as Huang Ko-wu recently concludes, modern Chinese intellectuals soon abandoned liberal democracy for violent revolution. Twentieth-century Chinese history was thus marked by a period of radicalization.²³ In summary, another charge of the modern democratic vision against Confucianism is its misleading concept of human nature and its ethical capacity.

The third major criticism of Confucianism is that its traditional view of community is incompatible with democratic governance. Lucian Pye was a pioneer in this perspective. He argued that the Confucian ethic is essentially family-centred, with its primary concern on the private sphere. Political life is always treated as the natural extension of one's family life and relationships, and the Confucian vision of an ideal society is thus defined by the existence of harmonious and particular relationships between familiar people. This narrow concept of political community prevents people from establishing mutual trust with strangers in collective action. As a result, the universal spirit of public reason and rule of law cannot take root in these prevailing familial communities.²⁴ In response to this critique, Tu Weiming emphasises that

²² Thomas Metzger, *A Cloud across the Pacific: Essays on the Clash between Chinese and Western Political Theories Today* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2005).

²³ Huang Ko-wu, *The Intellectual Trends and Figures in Modern China* (Beijing: Jiuzhou Press, 2015). See also Yu Ying-shih, *Review and Prospects for Contemporary Confucianism* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2004). For criticism of this stance refer to Lee Ming-huei, *Political Thought in Confucian Perspective* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2005).

²⁴ Lucian Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

there is a certain continuum from individual spiritual cultivation to corporate formation of various kinds of fiduciary communities: “It is important to note that the Confucians do not, by stressing the centrality of self-cultivation, undermine the corporate effort that is required for the family, the community, the state, and the world to become humane or fully human.”²⁵ With this expectation in mind, De Bary undertakes a comprehensive study of these communities in order to identify an explicit liberal tradition in Chinese history. He then reports, disappointedly, that at least until the nineteenth century, this political outlook had not come true; rather, it itself had become vague and uncertain.²⁶

It should be noted here that when scholars say Confucianism is “strange” from the perspective of modern democracy, they mean that Confucianism is a somehow anti-democratic tradition that needs to be corrected. Even for scholars who are sympathetic to Confucian ideas, traditional moral teachings must be critically compared with the values of liberal democracy. It assumes a shared mentality: that only the ideal of liberal democracy is morally desirable and must be taken as the benchmark in any meaningful and constructive interpretation of Confucian ethics. However, this judgment is biased – the reference point is set as the ideal account of liberal democracy, obscuring its problematic practice in the real world.²⁷ While the Christian critics of liberal democracy avoid a similar egotist temptation, they tend to take this dominant but peculiar regime for granted and thus fail to consider other alternatives in the modern democratic tradition.

For this reason, we reconsider Mou Zongsan and Karl Barth. Their practical commitment to democracy paves a nascent way to connect religious or moral traditions with political enterprises. Based on the historical record outlined in Chapter 2 and 5, we can focus on the work of Mou and Barth – specifically, on the topic of sustained ethical concerns of responsibility. As two contextual thinkers, both were deeply involved in political and ideological struggles at the cost of professional and even life security. Both sought to respond to cultural and political issues, the predicament of the people, and the prospect of human dignity in times of crisis. Both set personal examples for responsible actions and meanwhile affirmed collective responsibility along with the practice of democratic socialism. In this light, their active engagement in social democratic movements in Switzerland, Germany and China was hardly a historical coincidence. For them, only a democratic state, with its constitutional and

²⁵ Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany: UNY Press, 1989), 216.

²⁶ Williams de Bary, *The Liberal Tradition in China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1983).

²⁷ For a classical analysis of modern capitalist democracy see Crawford Macpherson, *The Real World of Democracy* (House of Anansi Press, 1992).

equalitarian features, was compatible with their moral visions. Moreover, responsibilities in local politics facilitated Mou's and Barth's contextual readings of democratic socialism and the associated political responsibilities and ethical concerns. Their religious or moral traditions helped them master the interactions between their political visions and contexts. It is this practical strength of Mou and Barth that makes us confident to examine their moral visions for democracy beyond the liberal horizon. It is worth noting that these observations are made through carefully incorporating socio-political contexts into the analysis of intellectual history. By so doing, we avoid highly abstract textual analysis of the normative voices of Barth and Mou within their traditions, which would unduly isolate them from considerations of concrete political pressures, judgements and consequences. More positively, recognising the contextual relationships between the ideas and actions of a thinker can enrich our understanding of the meaning of classic texts and their practical relevance. We believe that this is a productive way to read the political works of the two thinkers.

Drawing on these inspirations as well as on our conclusions from Chapter 5, the overlaps and differences in their political conceptions of responsible action can be identified. Both stress that political responsibility must be informed by the source of genuine humanity. For Barth, if the church as the Christian community is to be responsive to the world of politics in witness, it must first submit itself to the prophetic Word in order to acquire new strength in its political witness and develop a fundamental relationship to the civil community. Mou understands political responsibility as the actualisation of innate knowledge in state affairs. Everyone who seeks to pursue sainthood must embrace humanity in individuals and communities. In this light, it can be said that, for Barth and Mou, political responsibility must be taken as the guardianship of humanity in its concrete and common forms. While the content of political responsibility varies, following the two thinkers' distinct traditions, both point to the enterprise of democratic socialism in practice, and their approach to political vision distinguishes them from both realists and separatists. Their conviction is that responsible and responsive action can never arise out of the present world we share with our neighbours and even enemies. For this purpose, both Barth and Mou first consume a healthy diet of moral debate related to governance in a specific tradition and then create a unique intellectual and moral position for themselves. This strategy also involves creating a distinct community with a different set of values and a coherent way of incarnating them. Only in this way can the power of such a critical stance be presented without compromise or indifference. In summary, informed by the cases of Barth and Mou, we can learn a language of responsibility which allows us not only to connect tradition and democracy without undermining each side, but also to articulate the purpose and means of moral formation

in democratic politics. Such a profound vision for a common life, as the result of our comparative investigation and imaginative construction, is our fourth and most important contribution to the study of political ethics.

6.3 Responsible action in the neoliberal age

The last part of our reflections deals with the possible forms of responsible action which are both informed by traditions and meanwhile responsive to the current situation, i.e., *neoliberalism*, an updated version of modern capitalism. Here we will follow the footprints of Barth and Mou by asking two questions: What is going on? and What we should do? As historians have observed, the dominant groups have radically and conspicuously expanded their economic-political power has been conspicuous in this neoliberal age.²⁸ With this increased centralization of economic power in monopolistic sectors, society has become unable to control economic power for its own well-being. On the contrary, the economic power enjoyed by the rich few, co-opted via political and military power, has become the most coercive force in society. It can easily defy the authority of the state or even bend state institutions to its own purposes and interests. Therefore, ironically enough, while the economic power of the elite has become more irresponsible, political power – presented through the state and its apparatus – has been made more responsible to economic power. The net result is that political power has neglected the common good of society.²⁹ A salient example is care for the environment. Under the dominance of the market backed up by the neoliberal state, businesses and citizens often neglect their responsibilities to maintain clean air and water, to prevent pollution and severe

²⁸ A salient example is the recent volume of Michel Mann's massive *The Sources of Social Power*. See Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 4, Globalizations 1945-2011* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 129-178, 322-360. An earlier but excellent work is Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes*. Hobsbawm sees the rise of neoliberalism as a crisis of the historic structures of human relations which modern society inherited from tradition, and which had enabled it to function. As he observes: "The third transformation [of the last century], and in some ways the most disturbing, is the disintegration of the old patterns of human social relationships, and with it, incidentally, the snapping of the links between generations, that is to say, between past and present. This has been particularly evident in the most developed countries of the western version of capitalism, in which the values of an absolute a-social individualism have been dominant, both in official and unofficial ideologies, though those who hold them often deplore their social consequences. Nevertheless, the tendencies were to be found elsewhere, reinforced by the erosion of traditional societies and religions, as well as by the destruction, or autodestruction, of the societies of 'real socialism.'" Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), 15.

²⁹ What Niebuhr observed in Detroit during the 1920-30s seems also true for our time of neoliberalism. The key difference of the power structure between his progressive time and ours is that the dominant economic power is not differentiated from, but is collaborative and even merge with political and military powers. See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 14-15.

climate change – and governments fail to step in with proper regulations.³⁰ This is manifest first and foremost in the neoliberal turn of the Anglo-Saxon countries. Under the hegemony of the United States, neoliberalism has now become the global fashion in Asia, Africa, Latin America and continental Europe. Perhaps the image of an “immoral society,” made famous by American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, has never been so blatantly popular.

Among many contemporary scholarly attempts to conceptualize neoliberalism, the work of David Harvey stands out for its historical insightfulness and theoretical sharpness. In his masterwork *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Harvey provides a comprehensive account of neoliberalism since World War II, tracing diverse neoliberal trajectories in different countries.³¹ This historical and comparative study allows Harvey to define neoliberalism as a political project that includes two intertwined aspects: the operational strategy and the theoretical design. The first aspect refers to a set of deliberate strategies to create conditions for the effective accumulation of capital and the formation or restoration of class power. The second point indicates a theory of political and economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by maximizing entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework of private property rights, self-regulated markets and free trade. Although utopian, these ideas act as a real and powerful force for historical-political changes.³² Based on this theory/praxis distinction, Harvey further characterizes neoliberalism in seven dimensions: (1) the primary objective of the neoliberal project is to revitalize capital accumulation and thus to restore the class power of the capitalist elites; (2) the corporatization, commodification and privatization of public assets are the elites’ signal strategies; (3) the role of the state is critical to the neoliberal project, for it creates and preserves the necessary conditions for such practices and meanwhile takes on an entrepreneurial mode of governance; (4) the theoretical discourse of neoliberalism, centred on individual liberty, also plays a crucial role in directing, masking and justifying the practical agenda; (5) uneven regional and geographic development is not only inevitable but also encouraged by neoliberal practices; (6) the failure of the neoliberal project in achieving its utopian aims and its success in restoring class power lays the basis for mass movements calling for egalitarian rights, justice and democracy; (7) to sustain the unstable neoliberal system, the

³⁰ Michael Northcott, *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). See also Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, 361-399.

³¹ As Harvey stresses, it is critical to perceive neoliberalism not as a monolithic phenomenon but as various manifestations of a global trend in different contexts. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Chapter 1.

³² Ibid., 64-86.

ruling class tends to increase its authoritarian use of state power.³³ These features highlight the structure of the neoliberal regime as relatively coherent agenda with one end and many means.

A careful analysis of these features indicates the central role of the state in the neoliberal project; the state, once transformed into a set of neoliberal institutions, is required to get involved actively in all seven aspects.³⁴ Harvey himself calls this new type *the neoliberal state*. Compared to the preservatory role of the state as a night watchman, an ideal once defined by classical liberalism, this new type's positive presence is a distinctive feature of neoliberalism. Here the priority and normative role of the state is to promote the welfare of business rather than that of the general public. This is because, for neoliberal advocates, the single engine of social development should be the entrepreneurial class, which is responsible for economic growth and technological advance. Ordinary people merely receive their share of the benefits created by business, the so-called "trickle-down effect." Therefore, the state should not only tolerate the social disparity between the rich few and the majority; it must even facilitate this condition, since it offers incentives for creative and adventurous entrepreneurs. Beyond these tasks, the neoliberal state should not venture. According to neo-classical economics, state intervention in the market must be kept to a minimum because the state does not possess enough information about market signals in the form of prices and because the democratic interests of the majority will inevitably distort state interventions. By combining these active and passive roles, neoliberals have established a more refined normative stance regarding the purpose and function of the state than that of their predecessors. In practice, however, the neoliberal policies associated with this scheme have not been effective in the booming economy, though they have succeeded in restoring class power.³⁵ In other words, their main achievement is redistributive rather than generative. Alien to the normative rationale, transferring wealth and income from the mass of the population toward the upper classes has defined the functional role of the neoliberal state. This is pursued primarily through privatization schemes and reduction of social expenditures; Harvey calls these tactics *accumulation by dispossession*.³⁶ In practice, therefore, the state is the real engine of neoliberalism.

These critical components of neoliberalism are illuminating when we consider the trajectory of contemporary China towards neoliberalization. For historians, the so-called

³³ David Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610, no. 1 (2007): 21-44.

³⁴ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 64-86.

³⁵ See in particular the charts in Chapter 1 and 6 of Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. See also a recent critical review of the neoliberal economic policy by three IMF economists, Jonathan Ostry, Prakash Loungani and Davide Furceri, "Neoliberalism: Oversold?" *Finance & Development* (2016): 38-41.

³⁶ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Chapter 6.

Chinese road to modernization is a fundamental change from state socialism to state capitalism.³⁷ The general motif of the reform period was neoliberal, geared both to diminishing the role of the state in welfare provision and to increasing individual responsibility for social security and well-being.³⁸ While the reform agenda seemed merely tactical in its initial stages, it soon became more radical and finally it found its mature form in the early twenty-first century. Two political crises played a crucial role at every turning point. In the late 1980s, the Tiananmen democratic movement marked the first nationwide popular resistance to state-led marketization. Unfortunately, it also became the principal threat to the party-state's legitimacy. Along with its determination to crush the movement, the party leadership accepted a comprehensive package of neoliberalism to accelerate market transformation and welcome the emerging middle class in local governance.³⁹ In the late 1990s, underground resentment found another outlet: popular religion, as represented most infamously by *Falun Gong* (法轮功). The primary concern moved from direct political-economic criticism to anxiety about social and moral disorder. In the case of popular religion represented by Falun Gong, the party responded not only with violence but also by setting a new direction in both social programs and in the ideological propaganda.

The most recent stage of Chinese neoliberalism started in the early twenty-first century and has lasted more than a decade. As I have argued elsewhere, during this period and especially under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the CCP shifted its concern to the consolidation of moral leadership as its priority and to building confidence in the so-called Chinese model. New strategies have not only confirmed the neoliberal agenda, but also masked the existing neoliberal order characterized by the growing enforcement power of bureaucratic capitalist cadres.⁴⁰ Specifically, through incorporating the ideal of social harmony into the ideological configuration of state governance, Chinese neoliberals succeeded in unleashing the discursive power of the new scheme. The nascent ideological horizon of governance can be summarized in three aspects. First, it gives a coherent justification for neoliberal policies by creating a multi-layered discourse of governance. Instead of defending a single policy (like socialization of welfare), this well-designed intellectual scheme describes a holistic picture in which the general

³⁷ Immanuel Hsu, *Rise of Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 950-958; Roderick Macfarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 1-13; Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and after: A History of the People's Republic* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 449-482.

³⁸ For the most influential discussions of global neoliberalism and its Chinese variant, see Harvey, *A History of Neoliberalism*, Chapter 5 and Wang Hui, *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition*, trans. Theodore Huters (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

³⁹ Donald Nonini, "Is China Becoming Neoliberal?" *Critique of Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (2008), 161-162.

⁴⁰ Li Quan, *The Idea of Governance and the Spirit of Chinese Neoliberalism* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 72-78.

neoliberal turn of state policy can be rationalized. Second, it portrays the new political reality of Chinese civil society (and its elements) associated with the collaborative principles of governance. To this end, it has developed both a new grammar and a new set of categories to define the normative role of different social groups and their relationships and formulated promising reform proposals for a service-oriented government along neoliberal lines. In this way, the new scheme of governance transcends and replaces conflicting ideological narratives, showing new possibilities for attaining consensus in a neoliberal world. Third, the new discourse elaborates a superior rationale of collaboration. It calls for embracing the CCP's political and moral leadership and the related privileges of its cadres. Meanwhile, it introduces collaborative strategies and techniques, pitting the upper and disciplinary classes against the lower classes.⁴¹ Compared with the discourses from either the left- or right-wing camp, it has proven more responsive to the fundamental concerns of the ruling elite. For these three reasons, it can be said that governance has become the leading voice of Chinese neoliberalism in its mature stage.

After almost four decades of development, neoliberal hegemony has grown to become the primary obstacle to responsible citizenship and meaningful communal life. For many, Chinese society has become a hopeless zone full of manipulations, distrust and insecurity. Therefore, it was no surprise that, when the party-state recently decided to crush grassroots dissent and extend religious persecution to the whole country, there was little public opposition.⁴²

The above analysis of contemporary China provides a concrete and contextual case to understand the structure and dynamics of neoliberalism. It draws together the political, economic and ideological components of the neoliberal project and focuses on the state and its bureaucratic cadres as the primary engine of neoliberalism. Through the theoretical lens of Harvey, we are able to balance the institutional concern of Weber and ideological concern of Tillich and meanwhile update their criticisms of modern capitalism. The next step is to search for the responsible action in the category of the radical reformist approach. Following Barth and Mou, we shall identify a continuous effort in defending practical human freedom, dignity and moral conscience in the context of Chinese neoliberalism. Among dissidents, grassroots organizers, public intellectuals and religious leaders, Liu Xiaobo (刘晓波, 1955-2017), the Nobel Peace Prize winner, is the most prominent; besides his political activism, his confessions

⁴¹ Ibid., 87-116.

⁴² Wang Yanan, "For God or party? China's Christians face test of faith as President Xi cracks down on religion," *National Post*, August 7, 2018, available at: <https://nationalpost.com/news/world/christian-heartland-opens-window-into-fight-for-chinas-soul>.

from prison might be his most valuable legacy. Another significant event in this effort was the 2013 drafting of the Oxford Consensus, a document clearly stressing human rights and dignity formulated by a group of leading public intellectuals from the liberal, leftist, Confucian and Christian camps. The most recent case is a joint statement by four hundred courageous Protestant pastors for the sake of freedom, justice and love. Let us consider these three examples in reverse order.

From August to November 2018, a total of 458 Chinese house church pastors, led by Early Rain Covenant Church Pastor Wang Yi, released a joint statement titled “A Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith.”⁴³ The largest dissenting collective action since Falun Gong, it was a critical response of the Protestant Church to both the new religious regulations issued by the State Council one year earlier and the subsequent administrative actions of pressure, violence and persecution. At both local and regional levels, these measures have violated the constitutional rights of religion, association and expression, forcing church leaders to defend these rights and thus fulfil their responsibility of witnessing to political power. As the declaration claims,

We believe that these unjust actions are an abuse of government power and have led to serious conflicts between political and religious parties in Chinese society. These actions infringe on the human freedoms of religion and conscience and violate the universal rule of law. We are obligated to announce bad news to the authorities and to all of society: God hates all attempts to suppress human souls and all acts of persecution against the Christian church, and he will condemn and judge them with righteous judgment.

While denouncing unjust rulers, these dissenting pastors also feel obligated to proclaim good news to the ruling party and to society. They continue,

Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, the Saviour and King of mankind, in order to save us sinners was killed, was buried, and rose from the dead by the power of God,

⁴³ Wang Yi et al, “A Statement by Pastors: A Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith,” *Christian Times*, September 15, 2018, Available at: https://christiantimes.org.hk/Common/Reader/News/ShowNews.jsp?Nid=155518&Pid=102&Version=0&Cid=2141&Charset=big5_hkscs&p=1. For a biographical and theological analysis of Wang Yi, see Alexander Chow, *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 105-109, 162-173.

destroying the power of sin and death. In His love and compassion God has prepared forgiveness and salvation for all who are willing to believe in Jesus, including Chinese people. At any time, anyone can repent from any sin, turn to Christ, fear God, obtain eternal life, and bring great blessing from God upon his family and country.⁴⁴

Following Barth, we see this as a fruitful approach of political witness for the church in contemporary China. Even so, it is a rough road full of tension and conflict: only those with perseverance and hope will receive the final reward. Soon after the declaration was released, Pastor Wang Yi and his wife were both put in jail, accused of national-security crimes. Many of the other signers fell under investigation by the security police. If Barth had been able to take part, as he did in the Barmen Declaration, perhaps he could have made this point to those who still struggle in the frontiers of a neoliberal regime.

Five years before that joint statement, a group of prominent Chinese intellectuals gathered at Oxford University. The place was chosen deliberately to avoid political misreading. With diverse backgrounds – liberalism, leftism, Confucianism and Christianity – they expressed common concerns about the social and moral predicament of China. Moreover, they agreed that a promising response to the challenging issues would need to go beyond any single tradition or school of thought; therefore, they decided to work together to draw a blueprint for a future loving and trusting society. In this way, they took up the responsibility of public intellectuals as the critics and sentinels of the civil community. After careful deliberation, they drew up four common expectations. First, the rights of the people must be respected by the government and the people's consent must become the basis of political power. The governing order should facilitate not hinder the pursuit of happiness of the people. Second is the principle of justice and fairness: citizens should be treated equally in every domain of political, economic and social life and in every area of public-good provision, from education to healthcare. All people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion and social stratum, deserve security and dignity. Third, cultural pluralism must be embraced and great moral traditions must be respected. To honour the principle of harmony with difference, all people have the right to peaceful coexistence and to equal opportunities of free development. Fourth and finally, China should be committed to a fair and just world order in political, economic, military and environmental affairs. Appealing to the principle of mutual dependence and mutual benefit, China must serve the interests not only of her people but of all humanity. Promoting the peaceful and harmonious development of

⁴⁴ Wang Yi et al, "A Statement by Pastors: A Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith."

all nations can achieve the great peace under heaven for all.⁴⁵ These intellectuals' collective effort in forging mutual understanding across traditions and being responsible for pressing issues is remarkable, considering the domestic context set by the government: ideological restrictions and divide-and-rule tactics. The Confucian camp, in particular, maintained their central focus on the aim and usage of political power to achieve outer kingdom and meanwhile pave a new way for progressive politics centred on justice. In this respect, they were honouring the political legacy of Mou Zongsan but with more cultural inclusiveness. While the vision still lacks working details, it manifests a constructive dialogue and productive collaboration between proponents of traditions for the common good.⁴⁶

It is crucial to remember that the Oxford Consensus had as its archetype an even earlier document, Charter 08, with Liu Xiaobo as its principal drafter. The document called for a fundamental change of the party-state to abandon its authoritarian rule and endorse universal values such as human rights, equality, democracy, republicanism and rule of law.⁴⁷ Liu, a professor of literature and a critical intellectual, was imprisoned twice before his death from liver cancer. In April 1989, Liu was doing research as a visiting scholar at Columbia University. When he heard of the Tiananmen protests, he hurried back to China and stood with the student protesters until the night of the massacre. During this period, he encouraged the students and popularized a moral vision for the ongoing democratic movement. In his "Declaration of Hunger Strike on 2 June", he made democratic politics the antithesis of power struggle:

The Chinese history for thousands of years is full of violence and mutual hatred. In modern times, the enemy consciousness has become the inheritance of the Chinese. The slogan "class struggle is the key" after 1949 has pushed the traditional hatred, enemy consciousness and violence to the extreme. The current curfew also reflects the political culture of class struggle. Therefore, we call for a hunger strike, appealing to the Chinese to gradually abandon and eliminate their enemy consciousness and hatred from now on, and completely abandon the political culture of class struggle, because hatred can only produce violence and autocracy. We must start China's democratic

⁴⁵ The full text of Oxford Consensus 2013 is appeared on *New York Times*, October 18, 2013, available at: <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/18/full-text-of-the-oxford-consensus-2013/?searchResultPosition=1>.

⁴⁶ Some participants made similar comments on the significance of the consensus, see Xue Li, "Chinese Intellectual Community Seeks Consensus," December 12, 2013, *Financial Times*, available at: <http://www.ftchinese.com/story/001053860?full=y&archive>.

⁴⁷ For the full text of the document, see "Charter 08" on the official website of Congressional-Executive Commission on China, available at: <https://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/charter-08-chinese-and-english-text>.

construction with a democratic spirit of tolerance and collaboration. Democratic politics is a kind of politics without enemies or hatred. There is only negotiation, discussion and voting on the basis of mutual respect, tolerance and compromise.⁴⁸

In this democratic vision, mutual respect, tolerance and collaboration are highlighted as the alternative to violence and hatred; in other words, only through these actions can people be responsible to each other and build a genuine community of love, peace and justice. Instead of merely proposing an idealistic version of democracy, Liu strived to clarify the very spirit of the democratic endeavour. After the CCP's crackdown on the democratic movement, Liu was detained and jailed. But as soon as he was freed in 1991, he resumed his career as a writer and activist. Two decades later, when Liu made his last statement to the Court concerning his intention to draft the Charter, he reiterated the same motto ("I have no enemies") and explained the reasons for such a conviction: because "hatred can erode wisdom and conscience of an individual, and the enemy consciousness will poison the spirit of a people, incite the brutal struggle, ruin the tolerance and humanity of a society, and hinder the progress toward freedom and democracy of a nation." As he urged, "The process of abandoning the 'philosophy of struggle' is also a process of gradually diluting the enemy consciousness and eliminating hatred. It is a process of squeezing out the 'wolf milk' immersed in humanity."⁴⁹

Liu's courageous persistence did not save him from suffering in prison; instead, it facilitated his critical reflection on the lessons of the dissent/protest movement in light of an ethics of responsibility. As he gradually realised,

Those who oppose dictatorships do not lack courage, but courage does not equate with responsibility, just as a noble cause cannot replace responsible actions. In other words, the practice of conscience requires not only the courage of resistance but also the rationality and responsibility of public engagement.⁵⁰

For him, such distinction is critical because it is the conception of responsibility that addresses the dark side of the democratic movement in Tiananmen. As one of the movement's organizers, Liu not only witnessed the superiority complex, the drive for power and the hunger for status

⁴⁸ Liu Xiaobo, "A Declaration of Hunger Strike on June 2," in *From June Fourth to Charter 08: A Collection of Essays by Liu Xiaobo*, Vol. 1, ed. Yu Jie (Taipei: Lordway Press, 2016), 67.

⁴⁹ Liu, "I Have No Enemies: My Last Statement," in *From June Fourth to Charter 08*, 395.

⁵⁰ Liu, "Courage Does not Necessarily Equals Conscience: A Testimonial," *From June Fourth to Charter 08*, 327-328.

of the students and intellectuals, he also experienced the weakness, fear and vanity of his inner self. As he concluded, to a large degree, the whole movement lacked several key factors: a moral commitment to the wellbeing of the general public; a strong leadership to navigate collective passion; and a clearly defined blueprint. For the new generation of dissidents, especially their leaders, some critical lessons await:

It is not most important to adhere to the right causes and summon the courage – bearing the burden of responsibility is. That is, rational assessment, persistence and pragmatism are most important. The primary responsibility of the organizers of rights groups is to minimize the risks to the other participants in practice; the secondary is to strive for concrete and effective results, even if they are only limited and unsatisfactory.⁵¹

In short, the leaders of a democratic movement must be responsible for collective objectives, for their own strengths and weaknesses, and for the wellbeing of their partners. In his confessions, Liu presents his determination and perseverance to stand with his partners, both the living and the dead, to the end. His sufferings illustrate a unique intellectual and moral position of responsibility. Most importantly, built on his death, a distinct community and tradition with a different set of values has taken shape. Liu's embodiment of responsibility has attracted numerous followers, among them the makers of the subsequent consensus and joint statement. Like a compass, his life and death aid the navigation of our moral and political adventures towards genuine humanity, which is at risk in an age of neoliberalism. Karl Barth and Mou Zongsan, dedicated as they were to an ethics of responsibility, would heartily agree.

⁵¹ Liu, "A Response to Mr. Gao Han," *From June Fourth to Charter 08*, 310, 314.

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